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ADVERTISEMENT

THE Sermons gathered in this Volume deal with a series of subjects taken out of the Old Testament. Most of them were preached in St. Paul's Cathedral; none were published by Dr. Liddon; but all show signs of careful preparation. The central conviction which gives unity to them all, through their wide range of theme and diversity of treatment, is expressed on p. 197 in the following words:—

"There is some risk of blinding ourselves to the real meaning of the Old Testament—of its urgent and striking appeals to the Christian conscience and life,—by saying that this and that is only Oriental, and has therefore no relevancy for a modern European. Certainly there is a superficial element of custom and ceremony in the life described in the Old Testament which does belong to the ancient East, and which is untransferable to the circumstances of our own day and country. But human nature on the one side, and the great laws of God's Providential dealings on the other, were in the East, two thousand eight hundred years ago, exactly what they are now: and what occurred then 'was written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort' of these ancient 'Scriptures, might have hope,' as well as other virtues which are to be won from the perusal."

OXFORD, FEAST OF ST. BARNABAS,
1891.

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SERMON I.

THE CREATION.

GENESIS I. 1.

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

EVERY child among us knows these simple words; and yet how pregnant are they with interests—the interest of difficulty, but also the interest of instruction, to the strongest and keenest minds! I do not propose to invite your attention to the whole of the first chapter of Genesis: there is much more than enough to occupy us this evening in the opening verse. The latter portion of the chapter tells us how God, during a series of periods, of the real duration of which we can form no estimate whatever, and which, after the Eastern manner, are called "days," formed the various creatures, animate and inanimate, which we see around us, out of pre-existing matter. But the first verse of Genesis carries us back further and higher up than this. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." This is not merely a heading or summary of what is presently to follow. Nor does it merely tell us that God is the Author, both of our planet, and also of that vast system of worlds in which our planet is little more than a large aerolite. It does not merely assert that God created the immaterial as well as the material heavens and earth: that He created those vast multitudes of intelligences who have no bodily form, but who are wiser far and mightier than man. It implicitly

affirms that the process whereby all these orders of existence and of life were summoned into being was itself unique—an act strictly proper to God—an act impossible to a creature. "In the beginning God *created* the heaven and the earth."

What is creation in this primary Biblical sense of the term? It is not production of any kind. The Everlasting Son of God is begotten of His Father by a kind of unbegun, unending production, internal to the Being of God: He is "begotten," yet "not made." Creation is not, in its strictest sense, the giving form and order to pre-existent matter. Of that within limits man is capable. In that sense God has continued to create ever since the creation. It is possible, as was distantly suggested by P. Lombard[1] in the heart of the Middle Ages, and as a distinguished naturalist[2] of our own time has maintained, that He has continuously developed even new species of creatures by a natural selection out of lower species previously existing. In this, and other kindred ways, it may be that He "worketh hitherto."[3]

That which is proper to God is the summoning into being of matter, substance, life, which before was not, by an act of His Almighty Will. It is true that the Hebrew word translated "created" in our Bibles, although always used to describe the action of Almighty God, is used in some passages to describe creation in the lower sense, viz., God forming new beings out of already existing matter.[4] But, as has been observed by Gesenius[5]—a Hebrew scholar, to say the least, with no prejudices in favour of Christianity—the word must mean more than this in the first verse of Genesis. It must mean that the Universe originally owes both its form and its substance to the

[1] *Sentent.* lib. ii. distinct. xv.
[2] Darwin, *Origin of Species.*
[3] St. John v. 17.
[4] Gen. i. 21, 27; Ps. li. 10.
[5] Gesenii *Thesaurus Linguæ Hebraæ et Chaldææ*, s.v. בָּרָא, note.

creative fiat of God. And this is the natural sense of the passage in a translation, as in the original. The Christian Bible, like the Christian creed, begins with stating that all that is not God owes its being to God: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."

I.

1. It is remarkable that the Bible does not begin by saying, "God exists"—or, "There is one God." It begins by exhibiting God in action: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Why is this? Because the correctness of our belief about God, or indeed our having any serious belief about Him at all, depends altogether upon the idea which we form of His relationship to all beside Himself.

When we look forth from ourselves at the vast system of being in which we are placed, and of which we consciously form a part, we cannot, as thinking men, content ourselves with simply registering the surface impressions which we gain; we cannot but ask for an explanation of what we see. The problem of existence is indeed already settled for the Christian who believes his Creed and his Bible: although the Christian who realises his Creed is ever alive to the beauty and to the mystery of what he sees around him. But conceive that a thoughtful man, in the full maturity of his powers, had suddenly been placed in the midst of this beautiful system of natural life. His eye rests upon the forms and colours around him with keen, fresh delight. Earth, sky, sun, stars, clouds, mountains, valleys, rivers, seas, trees, animals, flowers, and fruits, in groups and separately, pass before him. His thought is still eagerly curious; it has not yet

been vulgarised and impoverished down to the point at which existence is taken as a matter of course: the beauty, the mysteriousness, the awfulness of the Universe, still elevates and thrills him; and his first desire is to account to himself for the spectacle on which he gazes. Whence comes it, this beautiful scene? What upholds it? Why is it here? Does it exist of itself? Is it its own upholder and ruler, or is there any Cause or Being in existence who gives it substance and shape? From this question there is no escape; we cannot behold the vast flood of life sweep before our eyes without asking whence it takes its rise: we cannot read the pages of that marvellous book of Nature and be indifferent to the question whether they have an Author. And thus it is that in circles where Christ is not named, or is named only in accents of contemptuous scorn, the question is asked in our day more and more importunately: Whence comes this Universe? what upholds it in being? for what end does it exist?

Now the Christian solution of this question is the only one which seriously respects the rights, nay, the existence of God.

Contrast it with the doctrine which would account for the Universe altogether without God; contrast it with pure Materialism. Materialism tells us that the Universe is eternal and self-existent. The Universe exists, because it exists. God of course it leaves out of the question altogether; it holds Him to have no real existence: He is pronounced to be a creature of the human imagination, the product of the human mind at a particular stage of its development. In its most elaborated modern form, this Materialism proposes to substitute two self-existent factors for the God of Heaven, two blind, all-powerful agencies —matter and force. It pronounces the Universe to be the result of innumerable combinations of self-existent force with self-existent matter; and it maintains that while

the quantity of this eternally existing force is invariable, force can transform itself into light, into heat, into electricity, into magnetism; it is, by turns, weight, affinity, cohesion, mechanism. It is inherent in matter; it is light and heat in the suns and in the fixed stars; it is mechanical impulse in planets which move around a central globe; it is cohesion or magnetism in the ponderable material of the heavenly bodies. Its action is regulated by uncreated, self-existent laws. "The laws of Nature," cries one writer of this school, "are barbarous inflexible forces; they know neither justice nor benevolence." And beyond Nature, we are told there is nothing—nothing save in the diseased imagination of man. Again I quote the words of a German author who is exulting in the supposed triumph of this materialistic philosophy: "No hand holds the earth in its course; no prayer can arrest the sun or lull the fury of the storm; no voice can raise the dead from their eternal sleep; no angel can deliver the captive; no hand stretched forth from the clouds can feed the hungry; no sign from heaven can tell us that we know anything beyond Nature. Beyond Nature there is nothing; and Nature," cries Feuerbach with all the ferocious exultation of despair, "Nature has no answer that she can make to the griefs or the prayers of man; she drives him back inexorably upon himself."

This is the sentence of Materialism and Atheism; and I do not here ask whether we can listen to a system which gives the lie both to the heart and to the conscience, to some of the deepest and profoundest aspirations of which man is conscious. But I bid you to look out for one moment upon the Universe, and ask yourselves if the materialistic account of its existence is even rational. That quick-witted and thoughtful people of antiquity, the Greeks, gave it a name which has lasted on into modern times: they called it the Cosmos. They meant by that word

that upon the face of the Universe there is stamped beyond everything else the imprint of an harmonious beauty. It meets the eye, it falls upon the ear of man, this harmony of nature; it is no fancy impression which we gain from that splendid spectacle of universal order. But why should this harmony exist? Why do we behold this regularity, this concerted and orderly movement of universal existence? If blind force and blind matter are the only ultimate factors of existence, why should chaos ever have terminated in a reign of such harmonious and perfect order? Materialism replies that force moulds matter in obedience to laws. But law implies a legislator, and the question is, Who has created the laws?—why do these laws exist, and no other? Has any presided then over that perpetual intercommunion of force with matter, and guided it by law to a result of such singular beauty? Atheism smiles at us Christians when we ask this question, and replies, "A Chance." Out of millions upon millions of chances that it might have been otherwise, one chance has carried the day: it has issued in the reign of order; it has eventuated in the world. Under the guidance of this Chance force and matter have determined into the Universe as we see it; and you yourselves, my brethren, with that marvellous apparatus of bodily organs which belongs to each one of you, and with that yet more wonderful apparatus of moral and mental faculties, you yourselves are said to be only its ripest product. This is the last word of materialistic discovery; the human mind with its quick and fine sensibilities, with its vast range of capacities, with its power of contemplating all nature lying around it, as a critic and in many ways a master,—the human mind itself is only a product of the eternal intercourse of blind force with blind matter under the guidance of Chance!

2. From this position a violent recoil is natural; and

when this recoil takes place without the guidance of Revelation the result is Pantheism. While the Atheistic Materialist says, "There is no God," the Pantheist answers "Everything is God." The Universe is not made by God; it is God in solution; God passing into various manifestations of being. God is the soul of the Universe; He is the common principle which constitutes its unity: He is at the root of, He combines, He manifests Himself in all its infinite variety of being and life. He is the common fund of life, which animates all that lives; He is the existence which is shared in by all that exists. Pantheism lays emphasis on, it exaggerates, two great truths—the Omnipresence of God, and the interdependence of created life. But Pantheism denies that God is independent of the world; it asserts that He has no existence apart from the Universe which manifests Him as being Himself. It asserts that He is not a Person, having as such consciousness, memory, and will: He is only an impersonal quality or force; or that He is an Idea, slowly realising itself in being. Of the general doctrine there are many shades and modifications, but they practically agree in making the Universe identical with God.

Pantheism often uses a religious kind of language which puts people off their guard and blinds them to its real nature and drift. But if Pantheism speaks of God it practically denies Him. Pantheism says that God is the Infinite; but then it goes on to say that this Infinite only exists in that which is finite. But if the Infinite be thus literally identified with the finite, it ceases to be, or rather never was, the Infinite, and there is in reality no Infinite in existence; in other words, there is no God. This is a speculative objection, sufficiently formidable but less serious than a moral objection which I proceed to notice. The very first element of our belief in God is that God is a Moral Being, that He is Essential Right, Essential Justice,

Essential Sanctity, Essential Purity, Essential Truth, Essential Love. But if you say with the Pantheist that God is Universal Life, and that Universal Life is God, you thereby destroy God's Morality. You make God the agent and producer of evil, as well as the agent or producer of good; or else you deny that the distinction between absolute good and absolute evil really exists. You make God, indeed, the energy which produces deeds of charity, of courage, of justice, of integrity; but you also identify Him with the energy which issues in adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, in all that is untrue, cruel, impure. And therefore, of two things one, if Pantheism be true. Either God is the Author of evil—a blasphemy which is destructive of His Essential Being; or else the distinction between good and evil is a chimera, a figment, and then the verdict of the moral sense is a weakly superstition, and you sap the basis of all possible religion by sapping the basis of morality.

3. Besides the doctrines of Materialistic Atheism and Pantheism there is one other supposition—the supposition that the Universe and God are both eternal; that an Eternal Universe has existed side by side with an Eternal God. This is the refuge of minds which shrink from the revealed truth of a creation, yet hesitate to acquiesce in the dark theories of a Universe without God, or a Universe which is God. But this third theory inevitably resolves itself into one of the two first. Unless it is to say that there are two Gods, two self-existent co-eternal beings, it must say either that the Universe is the reality, and God the imaginary counterpart, or it must say that the Universe itself is God. And if, somewhat violently, this consequence be declined, and the co-existence of God and an Eternal Universe be resolutely maintained, whence then, we ask, come the laws, the harmony, the form of this self-subsisting, uncreated Universe? We have only the difficulties

of Atheism or of Pantheism, as the case may be, without their completeness. But if it is impossible to acquiesce in the idea of a Universe without God, or of a Universe which is itself God, or of a Universe which is co-eternal with God, and so a second God, it remains that we accept the Bible statement of a Universe created by God. This statement alone is really consistent with serious belief in the existence of a Supreme Being. The last-mentioned theory denies His solitary supremacy; Pantheism buries Him in moral darkness: Atheistic Materialism denies Him outright. One relation of God towards the Universe, and one only, is compatible with a serious Theism: it is expressed by Moses: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."

II.

But the doctrine of Creation does not merely protect the Supremacy, the Personality, the Sanctity, the Reality of God: it sheds yet more special light upon His Nature and Character.

(*a*) And here, observe how it illustrates the boundless resources of God's Self-existent Life. For the point before us you will remember is that in His original creative act, God did not merely fashion existing materials into new forms: He called into being the very material which He would subsequently fashion; He called it into being out of nothingness. No matter whatever, nor any created spirit, had any antecedent existence, save in the infinite possibilities latent in God's Almighty Will. By the fiat of that Will it began to be. The shapeless, graceless mass of rudimentary matter, "without form, and void,"[1] to which order and form would be imparted during a long series of subsequent ages, was summoned into existence. This

[1] Gen. i. 2.

stupendous act of power is distinctly proper to God: it is so entirely above our human capacity that the imagination strains itself in vain to depict the process; we can only attempt to measure it by contrast,—by contrast with our own impotence. Man, it is true, can create, in a lower sense: he can give to materials made ready to his hand a form and capacity which, but for his industry and his genius, would not have belonged to them. Speaking in the midst of this vast metropolis, of this magnificent temple, how can I deny that man is in a sense a creator? The creations of his industrial enterprise, the creations of his literary and artistic genius, the creations of his political and administrative ability, the creations of his religious instincts, lie plentifully around us. But these creations pre-suppose in each and every case a material which man did not create. You are painters, musicians, poets, architects, politicians. But you only employ, and combine, and organise: you do not create. You invoke the laws of production, you cannot enact them. You combine colours, you harmonise sounds, you arrange words in obedience to thoughts, you range stones on stones high into the air till you have visibly expressed ideas which move the souls of men, you devise schemes of government, or you strive to augment the wealth of nations. But you can do no more. You seem perhaps to go a step further back, but you are as far from real creation as ever. You substitute brick which you have made for stone which you could not make, but you cannot make the clay out of which you make the brick. You combine sounds and colours, and you seem to have added to the existing stock of beauty which charms the ear and the eye: but can you create the primary sounds or colours which you so successfully combine? You have a new idea or combination of ideas, and you coin a new word, as you say, to express it: but if your new word

is to be understood, it dares not be absolutely new, or it would be unintelligible: it is merely the modification of some current expression, foreign or domestic, to an unaccustomed sense. You can as economists augment capital by making the most of its twin sources; but can you create those sources? It is true that the printing-press and the steam-engine are your creations; but the force of compressed vapour is as old as the Universe; and in one form or another the material of every printing-press in Europe has existed since the moment of the Creation. You have only observed, discovered, applied properties and materials which you could never have created: and at this moment you perceive the real limits of your creative power, when you reflect that by no amount of strength or skill could you bring a single atom into existence, or crush a single atom into nonentity: you can only shift and combine existing atoms: you can only decompose, or accumulate the material around you. You can inflict upon that material the glorious imprint of your taste or of your intelligence; but if you would rival the primal creative act of God, whereby He gave being to non-existent matter, you find yourselves as powerless as the zoophyte which is so low in the scale of being that you cannot clearly distinguish it from a vegetable; you are not less removed than it from participation in the inalienable creative prerogative of the Most High.

(β) Observe, too, as an element of creation, the presence of that mysterious gift, so intimately present to each one of us, in its essence so entirely beyond our power of analysis, which we call Life. We know life by its symptoms: by growth and movement, by feeling and gesture; and in its higher forms, by speech and expression. What is life? It is growth in the vegetable; it is feeling and movement in the animal; it is thought, reflection, resolve in man, as these manifest themselves in speech and look and action.

But what is it in itself, in its essence, this gift of life Science, the unraveller of so many secrets, is silent here: as silent as when she had not yet begun to inquire and to teach. She can define the conditions, the accompaniments, the surroundings, the phenomena of life: but its essence she knows not. It is a mystery which eludes her in her laboratories and her museums: each of her most accomplished votaries carries it perpetually with him, and understands it as little as does the peasant or the child. Oh marvellous gift of life! true ray of the Creator's Beauty, in thy lowest as in thy highest forms! We men can foster it; we can stint it; we can, by a profound natural mystery, as parents, yet in obedience to inviolable laws, transmit it as a sacred deposit to beings which have it not; we can crush it out by violence into death. But we cannot create it. Much indeed we men have done to detect the secret forces of the natural world, and to lead them captive in the procession of our advancing civilisation. We have made steam the instrument of a motive power, stronger and swifter than that of the strongest and swiftest animals; we have bidden the electric fluid become the instantaneous messenger of our thought across continents and oceans; the sunlight is now an artist whom we detain in our studios, and whose capacities we are even yet slowly discovering. But no force however strong, no fluid however subtle, no combination of chemical materials however well adjusted, enables us to command the primal sources of life—of that awful gift which issues only from the Hands of God. Again and again man has believed himself on the eve of securing that high prerogative: again and again his expectations have ended in failure and disappointment. We can build a Crystal Palace, and fill it with the choicest products of human industry and skill, but we cannot confer animal life upon the tiniest insect that pitches upon its windows: we cannot bestow vegetable life upon

the most neglected weed that springs up unbidden in the adjacent gardens. Life, my brethren, in its lowest as in its highest forms, is a prerogative gift of the Creator; man can determine its measure, he can maim its beauty, he can crush it into death; but he cannot originate it, he cannot even discover what in its essence it is.

(γ) Once more, God creates in majestic and perfect freedom. No force was put upon Him: the Universe did not escape from Him against His Will or without it, like some volcanic eruption or graduated emanation of His Being. He made it, but He might have left it unmade. He made it, as He made it; He might have made it otherwise. It exists as we see it; and the question cannot be repressed, —awful as it is,—why did He make it?

To that question, my brethren, I know no answer save that hinted at by the prophet, that God created out of the exuberance of His Love.[1] He willed to be surrounded by beings who should know and love Him, and upon whom He might shed the response of an Infinite Affection. True, He needed nothing in His blissful Eternity before creation. Self-sustained, Self-sufficing, rejoicing in the unbegun, unending, ineffable bliss of Their ceaseless intercommunion, the Three Divine Persons, within the One Indivisible Essence of Godhead, lived alone throughout an eternity. No created being could add to the bliss of God: none could lessen it: and yet the Divine Love willed to summon a whole creation into being, upon which, in its perfectness and beauty, and even in its misery and shame, that Love might lavish its caresses.

Do we not here see the great promise, which adjusts Christian thought to a belief in the mysteries of the Christian creed? True, the Incarnation is a stupendous mystery, but it is at least not a greater mystery than the Creation. It is at least not more difficult to say why

[1] Jer. xxxi. 3.

God should have taken on Himself a created form, to live in it as an Example, and to lead it on to death as an Atoning Sacrifice, than why He should have created at all. Each is an act of power: each is an act embodying the gift of life; this in a lower, that in a higher sense. The motive of each is Love. And has it ever seemed to you that in Redemption, Eternal Love seeking God's lost and degraded family, is shrouded at times in a dark robe of mystery, and covered with the ignominy of apparent failure? There is, you say, the Bible, unfolding God's Will; yet how many never read it, or read it only to reject, to cover it with ribald profanity! There is the Church, the House of God's family; but how many see in her only a polity of this world and turn a deaf ear to her heavenly claims! There is the Spirit; but how many grieve or quench His presence! There are the Sacraments; but multitudes only eat and drink judgment or refuse to eat and drink at all—not discerning beneath the earthly veils the Body of the Lord![1] There is the Cross of Jesus, the fountain-head of all blessing and pardon—rising as the Symbol and Instrument of a Universal Mercy: yet who shall tell the tale of souls for whom the Atoning Blood was poured forth in vain?

True, my brethren, it is so: but it is with Creation as with Redemption; the difficulty for the Christian is an equal difficulty for the serious Theist. God respects the free-will which He has given us, even when it is turned against Him: we could not have been so majestically like Him as we are unless He had given it us. He created us, knowing that His gift of free-will would be abused: He redeemed us, knowing that despite would be done to the Atoning Blood. A petty human philosophy may mutter: "It were better not to have created or redeemed at all." But an Apostle exclaims, "O the depth of the riches both

[1] 1 Cor. xi. 29.

of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God!"[1] His far-sightedness is not to be dwarfed down to the range of our spiritual telescopes: nor is the fulness of His Love to be stinted to a Universe because you or I should wilfully reject it. True, both in Creation and Redemption there is a shadow which is a foil to the Eternal Love: Love burns bright, but is ever and anon robed in mystery. A passing cloud may hide the star-light from our eyes during the brief night of time: but all shadows will have rolled away for ever when the Eternal Day[2] has once broken upon the redeemed intelligence.

III.

Some of you, my brethren, will perhaps be thinking to yourselves: "We expected to hear a practical sermon; and we get, instead of it, a speculative disquisition upon the origin of the Universe. What can it signify to the state of a man's conscience, to his performance of his daily round of duties, whether he believes or does not believe that matter is not eternal, and that the Universe was created by God out of nothing?" My brethren, I say that it matters a great deal. The belief that God made the Universe out of nothing is pre-eminently a practical belief. It cuts out by the roots the lingering and false notion which many a man fondles with such subtle tenacity, that in some sense he exists by his own right.

I speak not now to the poor, to the old, to the sick, to those who cannot but feel day by day how frail is the tenure by which they hold to life, and who cling earnestly and trustfully to an Unseen Arm. But you may meet many a man in the streets of this Metropolis whose speech and manner, whose action and bearing, might convince

[1] Rom. xi. 33. [2] Song of Sol. ii. 17.

you that he practically looks upon himself as a self-existent being. He would not perhaps admit that he held that conviction in so many words: but if you could take his thought on the subject to pieces, and sort out its various ingredients, you would find that he habitually assumes himself to exist, partly through a vague Divine permission; more distinctly, as a consequence of the will of his earthly parents; most of all, in virtue of an intrinsic right to existence, which he does not analyse but takes for granted. He feels life bounding in his veins; he is conscious of his strong sinews, and it may be of his keen and vigorous wit; and perhaps he is surrounded by all that makes this world attractive: he has education, position, fortune, friends: or at any rate, he has a hard head and a brawny arm; he has made a home for himself by his own exertions; his life hitherto has been a triumph of self-reliance, and living as he does in this great city, all that falls upon his ear, all that meets his eye, speaks of man, of man's energy and skill, of man's progressive victories over the forces around him, of man's lordly empire over all other visible forms of life. As the poet Cowper says, with a profoundly religious sentiment, if only with partial truth,

"God made the country, but man made the town."

At any rate, in the town, man has moulded the materials with which God supplies him: man's activity is prominently in the foreground; and as the dense fogs are in part the creations of your industry, and for hours or days in every year entirely hide God's sunshine from your view; so a thick intellectual vapour, often less transient, alas! than its material counterpart, issues from this constant unrelieved contemplation of human energy and skill, and hangs drearily between many a noble soul and the God Who made it. Ah! my brother, is it not so?

Thou shrinkest from confessing to thyself that there is One Being in existence to Whom thou owest, literally, all that thou hast, all that thou art. Thy self-reliance, thy sense of vigour, let me say it, thy pride, is unwilling to look beyond the cobwebs, the influences, atmospheric, social, political, the happy accidents, the second causes—cobwebs which thou hast spun around thy thought—that thou mayest screen, if possible, from thy view the overwhelming sight of the creative Majesty and the inalienable rights of God. Thou wouldest fain not own that thou art a created thing, and that thou art owned by a Creator. Yet let me ask, with the Apostle, If a Supreme Being exists at all, what hast thou that thou didst not receive?[1] There is no real choice between a rejection of Theism and a loyal acknowledgment of God the Creator and of the rights which flow from that relationship to His creatures. Open thine eyes, and behold how all outward blessings, all bodily endowments, all mental strength and beauty, as well as all spiritual grace, stream from One Hand, through whatever channels, across whatever regions of space or time—to thee—even to thee. Thou didst but accept these gifts, each and all; the very personality within thee, the "I" of which thou speakest in the centre of thy being, and which is thyself, is itself a gift. One thing only thou hast contributed, purely too from thine own stock of resources; one thing which the Almighty Creator Himself could not have furnished to thee: thou hast sinned. Yet thou art what thou art, thou hast what thou hast, not that thou shouldst wrap thyself in a purblind selfishness, not that thou shouldst think meanly or despairingly of thy lot, but that thou shouldst take the place for which the Everlasting Love of the Creator designed thee in the perfected Universe of life. Thy being need not be an eternal failure, unless thou art

[1] 1 Cor. iv. 7.

resolved to have it so. For thee, a sinner, there are gifts superadded to the gift of creation;—the priceless Blood of Atonement Which washes out all sins, even the foulest; the Illuminating Spirit; the Sacraments of Life. Awake, thou that sleepest in some dream of Pantheistic or Materialistic error, in some deadening slumber of sensual passion or of worldly ambition, awake to realise the awfulness, but also the blessedness of existence! "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."[1] Whether thy path here be strewn with roses, or entangled with thorns, if thou believest in a Creator, revealed more clearly in Redemptive Love, thou knowest the secret, the majesty of thy destiny. Soon thou shalt place thy foot upon the threshold of Eternity, to gaze face to face upon Him from Whom all life proceeds, and to Whom, whether for acceptance or for judgment, all returns. Then thou wilt acknowledge that without the knowledge of thy Creator, thy earthly life had been indeed a misery; thou wilt bless Him for bringing thee by His Mercy to that Home which He prepared even for thee, when in the beginning He created the heaven and the earth.

[1] Eph. v. 14.

SERMON II.

THE EGYPTIAN OVERTHROW.

ROM. IX. 17.

For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew My power in thee, and that My Name might be declared throughout all the earth.

NO event in the history of the Old Testament is, in the mind of the Church of Christ, so closely connected with the yearly festival of our Lord's Resurrection as is the deliverance of Israel from the Egyptian bondage. This was the conviction of the earliest Christian Church, as it is of the Church of the present day. It will not have escaped you that all the three lessons from the Old Testament which are appointed to be read on Easter Day refer to events connected with the Exodus: to the Institution of the Passover; to the Journeyings of the Children of Israel towards the Red Sea; to the great Egyptian Overthrow. The history of the Exodus has this in common with the Resurrection of our Lord: that either event is a deliverance from a bondage—a triumph over a hostile and oppressive power. In the one case, a nation is delivered, in the other He in Whom all nations of the earth are blessed. In the one case an earthly tyranny is vanquished and defeated; in the other the unearthly powers of sin and death. The connecting link between the two is found in the Passover, which was instituted on the eve of the Exodus from Egypt, to commemorate the

saving of the first-born of Israel, and at the celebration of which the Death and Resurrection of our Lord took place. So that we say with St. Paul, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us, therefore let us keep the feast."[1] And with the Church, in the Easter Preface, "Christ is the very Paschal Lamb, Which was offered for us, and hath taken away the sin of the world; Who by His Death hath destroyed death, and by His Rising to life again hath restored to us everlasting life."[2] And in the Baptismal Service we recall the Red Sea, through which the children of Israel were safely led, as figuring the waters of Baptism through which we pass out of the bondage of the old nature into the freedom and opportunities of the new. And thus, as we sing the old Hebrew Psalm of triumph, "When Israel came out of Egypt, and the House of Jacob from among the strange people,"[3] we read into it a new and deeply Christian meaning: the triumph of Christ over the Grave, achieved for us and in us, the conquest of Sin and Satan and Death.

Now, the deliverance from Egypt brings before us two prominent figures,—Moses, the lawgiver and leader of the chosen people; and Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, the head over the house of bondage. Let us, under the guidance of St. Paul when writing to the Romans, consider what we ought to think about the less interesting of these two figures—about king Pharaoh.

I.

Pharaoh, as you would know, was the common name of all the kings of Egypt; the word points to the Sun, Ra, whose representative upon earth the Egyptian king for the time being was believed by his people to be. The Egyptian king was called by his people and by strangers

[1] 1 Cor. v. 7, 8.
[2] The Order of the Holy Communion.
[3] Ps. cxiv. 1.

the Pharaoh, the greatness of the office quite overshadowing the person of its holder; who the Pharaoh might be was a matter of little importance, provided that there was one. Thus in the description of the oppression of the Israelites in Egypt, and of the plagues which preceded their deliverance, in the early part of the Book of Exodus, it would appear from the narrative that only one king was referred to, whereas we know from independent sources that there were really two. The Pharaoh of the earlier oppression was Rameses II., the last of the four greatest conquerors who ruled in ancient Egypt: the Pharaoh of the Exodus itself was his third son, Meneptah, who carried on his father's policy, and succeeded to the throne some time before the catastrophe in the Red Sea. It was to this last king that Moses addressed the words which are quoted by St. Paul: they were uttered just before the plague of hail:[1] "For this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee My power, and that My Name might be declared in all the earth."

II.

A man of the world and a religious man look at the same question in very different lights. Let us endeavour to understand how the question of dealing with the Israelites in Egypt may have presented itself to the Pharaoh Meneptah.

For why a monarch, even a Pagan and despotic monarch, should set himself to oppress a large class of his subjects, does not at once occur to us. Why should he not wish to live on good terms with them, and to encourage in them kindly feelings towards himself? Why should it not be a pleasure to him to know that, although he was their absolute master, he had their good wishes? This surely is human nature. Why should he set himself to make enemies

[1] Exod. ix. 16, 18, 23.

—exasperated and desperate enemies—of a population which it might not have been more difficult to conciliate than it had been for the Pharaoh of Joseph's time, the shepherd-king Apophis?

This question would perhaps have been answered by Meneptah by pointing to the circumstances of the kingdom of Egypt at the time of the Exodus.

Remember, then, that when Abraham went down into Egypt, and when, three generations later, Joseph became a kind of prime minister to the reigning Pharaoh, Egypt was ruled by shepherd-kings, as they were called. These shepherd-kings were really the chiefs of wandering Asiatic tribes. They had settled in the triangular district, the Delta between the modern Cairo and the Mediterranean; they had confined the old native kings of Egypt to the southern portion of the country, and had made them tributaries, virtually subjects. These shepherd-kings, being Asiatics of some kind, although they had adopted Egyptian language and habits, welcomed the first fathers of the race of Israel, as, in some distant degree, probably akin to themselves, and so they extended to the Patriarchs the various favours which are described in the book of Genesis. But some little time after Joseph's death a great change took place. A descendant of the ancient native kings of Egypt defeated the reigning shepherd-king, and not only revolted, but re-conquered from him the whole of Northern Egypt, and expelled the Asiatic dynasty which had ruled it. This is the meaning of that saying of Scripture, that "another king arose, which knew not Joseph."[1] He was not only a personally distinct king, but a king of a distinct and hostile dynasty. Two consequences followed from this important change of circumstances. The first was a series of the most dreadful kind of wars,—wars of revenge. In two successive

[1] Exod. i. 8.

dynasties, the 18th and 19th, four great monarchs, of whom Rameses II., the Pharaoh of the oppression, was the last, poured the armies of Egypt across Canaan and the Lebanon district into the heart of Western Asia, to the banks of the Orontes, and even of the Euphrates. They were chiefly engaged with that great race of whose history and power learned men have only learnt the real outline in the last twenty years,—the Khita, or Hittites. The other consequence was that the position of the Israelites in Egypt, as of some other Asiatic settlers there, was altogether changed: instead of being still regarded with favour by the ruling powers, they were looked upon with dislike, suspicion, and perhaps, in view of their increasing numbers, with fear. And as the timid are especially wont to be cruel, the oppression of the Israelites was mainly a result of this fear. When Rameses II. was conducting a difficult campaign on the Orontes, against a very powerful Asiatic enemy, he thought with some misgiving of the numerous tribe of Asiatics who were living and thriving on the soil of Egypt, in the neighbourhood too of his northern capital: and the measures which he took for reducing their numbers, as described in the book of Exodus, and for obliging their male population to engage in forced labour, were a consequence of this misgiving. The oppression of the Israelites was the act of a patriotic despot, embarrassed by no such scruples on the score of humanity as would be natural to us, and thinking only of what was the prudent course to take, in the interests of Egypt, in critical circumstances.

This oppression lasted for many years: probably for much more than half a century. Rameses died at an advanced age; and his son, Meneptah, inherited with his father's throne his father's policy. That the Israelites should be kept at hard servile work in Egypt appeared to him to be good common sense recommended by the

authority and experience of his deceased father. If he was to show a bold front to the great Asiatic powers beyond his frontier, he must keep the Asiatics within it well under his heel.

Now Israel, as we know, was not only a nation, it was a Church: not only instinct with the sense of patriotism and love of freedom, but conscious of possessing a higher knowledge of God than the heathen around it. It was this which led to the demand for permission to go into the desert for the purpose of offering a solemn act of worship to God, which the circumstances of the bondage, and probably the prejudices of the Egyptians, forbade at Zoan. Such a proposal on the part of the leaders of an enslaved tribe seemed to the cool-headed Egyptian statesman, with absolute power at his disposal, not less than preposterous. And thus, after a temporary hesitation, he determined to prevent their going at all costs, and we know what the costs really were.

Such then was the mind of the Pharaoh Meneptah, when plague after plague and remonstrance after remonstrance were directed to shake his resolution. And perhaps it may occur to us to ask, whether he was not, from his own point of view, quite right; and whether there is in equity and reason any sufficient ground for the stern words which Moses, in God's Name, addressed to him, and which St. Paul quotes with such entire approval: "For this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee My power, and that My Name might be declared in all the earth"?

III.

"For this cause have I raised thee up!"

How can we reconcile it with the Divine Perfections of Justice and Mercy, that a human being should be thus brought upon the stage of life in order to illustrate the

powerlessness of the creature that presumes to measure himself against the Will of the Creator?

The truth is that such passages of Holy Scripture as that before us state one side, and only one side, of the complete truth. They put before us very vividly God's Sovereignty in the moral world: they do not notice, as other passages in Scripture do notice, man's persistent free will and responsibility. If God raises up men like Pharaoh to show forth His own Moral Supremacy, Pharaoh is all the while the master of his own destiny; he is raised up to be what he became, by his own resolve, his own rejection of the light which might have saved him, his own clinging to the errors which he might have rejected.

Observe that the Pharaoh Meneptah was not without means of knowing, or at any rate of suspecting, something of the true character and mission of the people of Israel, as the people of Revelation. His bearing before Moses and Aaron, again and again, implies this; and it may be gathered from some independent considerations. The earliest religion of Egypt, as we know from the monuments, was certainly belief in One Supreme Power, and this had only become degraded into the worship of the various functions and aspects of Nature as separate divinities in the course of long ages. The secret of the ancient truth was still preserved by the priestly colleges attached to the great temples of Thebes, and Memphis, and Abydos: and each Egyptian monarch could, if he willed, be initiated into it. This was "the wisdom of the Egyptians," in which St. Stephen tells us Moses was learned:[1] he did not, indeed, learn the Unity of God from the Egyptian priests, but his ancestral faith may well have been illustrated by that which he learnt from them. Then in the dynasty which immediately preceded that of Meneptah,

[1] Acts vii. 22.

an Egyptian king, Khu-en-aten Amenophis IV., had actually endeavoured to restore the worship of One God under the crude form of devotion to the Sun's disk. This attempt got the king into great and varied trouble; but the circumstances must have been well known to all the kings of the succeeding or 19th dynasty, and the solemn truth that there is only One God must have been impressed more or less distinctly upon their consciences by the spasmodic but resultless effort of their bitterly-condemned predecessor. When Moses stood before Pharaoh and spoke in the Name of One God, in such tones of authority, he touched, we may be sure, a chord—if not of sympathy, yet at least of apprehension—in the mind and conscience of his royal hearer. And the desperate determination of the Pharaoh to turn a deaf ear to his appeals was the conduct of a man who wishes not only to awe an outward opponent, but to crush his own inward and personal misgiving, in the hope that if he only resisted enough it would disappear. Thus it was that he was by turns obdurate and yielding, until at last he engaged in the enterprise which involved his kingdom in such a serious disaster, and led to the freedom and triumph of the people of Israel.

There is no necessity for our entering on the various critical questions which have been raised with respect to the Exodus: such as whether the scene of this event was what we call the Red Sea, or the ancient Serbonitic lake on the coasts of the Mediterranean; nor again whether the Pharaoh Meneptah lost his life, or escaped after the loss of his army. One thing is quite certain, namely, that the event was an enormous blow to the power of Egypt. The event is not, indeed, mentioned in the contemporary Egyptian inscriptions: no national disasters ever are. But its effects appear in the reduced power and circumstances of the Egyptian monarchy: Egypt never again

became the power which it had been under Rameses II. The effects of the disaster which overwhelmed the Pharaoh Meneptah are written on the face of history; and his name now is remembered only as that of one whose destiny it was to show forth the Power of Him Whose Will he resisted, and to help to spread among the nations the Divine Name which he would fain have silenced on the lips of men.

IV.

There are some practical points which suggest themselves for consideration.

(*a*) We have, first of all, before us the pathetic and awful spectacle of the growth of a human being into an attitude of fixed opposition to the All-Holy and Almighty God. I say the growth of a human being: for it was a growth: it did not come to be all at once. A man does not become evil all at once; he is perhaps only half-conscious of the direction which he is taking, of the change which is slowly but surely going on within him.

There was a time, no doubt, when the Pharaoh Meneptah was a bright, thoughtless boy, with a kind mother who loved him tenderly; and as he grew up he was probably at first, and generally, well-meaning, according to his lights, and his actions, as we have seen, may have been shaped in part by the traditions of his family and the supposed necessities of his position. But these were not irresistible, and at last the work of hardening, as Scripture calls it, was complete: and by a well-known licence of language, God is said to have done that which He permitted: to have hardened Pharaoh's heart, that he would not let the people go.[1] Throughout the long ages of Jewish and Christian history no name more represents emphatic

[1] Exod. x. 20, 27.

hostility to the cause and honour of God among men, or the discomfiture which sooner or later awaits such hostility, than that of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. As the Jew passed in review the enemies of his people,—Titus, Antiochus, Nebuchadnezzar, Sennacherib, Goliath, Jabin, —Romans, Græco-Syrians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Philistines, Canaanites,—none seemed to loom so large in the perspectives of history as the Pharaoh whom Moses had defied. And as the Christian looks back from a more distant age over that yet earlier history, he too sees in the enemies and oppressor of God's earlier people that which the Jew saw in them; but he sees, perhaps, with his larger and clearer faith, somewhat more. He knows that they are dark shadows on earth of that invisible spirit whose will is fixed in antagonism to God, and who can mould men in different degrees into being his own agents and instruments. Isaiah's description of the descent of the king of Babylon into the world of the dead melts insensibly into a more awful picture of the fall of Satan:—

> "How art thou fallen from heaven,
> O Lucifer, son of the morning!
> How art thou cut down to the ground,
> Which did weaken the nations!
> For thou hast said in thine heart,
> I will ascend into heaven!
> I will exalt my throne above the stars of God,
> I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation,
> in the sides of the north:
> I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;
> I will be like the Most High.
> Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell,
> To the sides of the pit."[1]

And in the same way the words which Moses addressed to Pharaoh, and which St. Paul quotes so emphatically, are less true of any mortal man than of the fallen archangel: "For this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee My power." Satan too was once a bright and

[1] Isa. xiv. 12-15.

glorious angel, who rejoiced in the service of the Most Holy, but who fell when his will was warped by pride. Satan too had his time of trial: he was not forced,—God forbid,—to be the prince of evil; he became it in the exercise, or rather the abuse, of his perfectly free will. But having chosen to be the first-born of rebellion, he was not simply at large as a disturbing force: the evil which the All-Holy could never have created, He might permit and control: in the vast universe there was a place and a function assigned to the apostle of universal revolt. "For this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee My power, and that My Name might be known throughout all the earth." We Christians know that this power was exhibited when our Lord, by His Cross and Death, spoiled principalities and powers, and the chief among them all—leading them through the invisible world, so the Apostle's image might suggest, as would a Roman general behind his car of victory,—making a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it:[1] we know that it was exhibited when by death He destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and delivered those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.[2] We are told that men no longer believe in Satan; that for our generation the invisible house of bondage, with its fallen monarch, no longer exists! If this be so, a great deal more is or will be presently disbelieved in as well; but a Christian who submits to and accepts the teaching of the New Testament cannot but be struck with this fresh proof of the finished ingenuity of our great spiritual enemy. Like those masters of the art of earthly war who conquer less frequently by an ostentatious display of force on the battle-field than by carefully concealed surprises which turn the position of an antagonist, so Satan, it seems, has persuaded

[1] Col. ii. 15. [2] Heb. ii. 14.

a frivolous and shallow generation that he no longer exists but as a discredited phantom of the past, as an extinct terror, as a popular joke! Ah! he has not been at work upon the human heart for nothing during these many thousands of years; he knows how to lull us to sleep to the best advantage, that he may take our thoughts and affections, and, above all, our passions, well into his keeping: "he sitteth lurking in the thievish corners of the streets, and privily in his lurking dens doth he murder the innocent; his eyes are set against the poor: he doth ravish the poor, when he getteth him into his net. He falleth down, and humbleth himself, that the congregation of the poor may fall into the hands of his captains. He hath said in his heart, Tush, God hath forgotten; he hideth away his face, and he will never see it." [1]

"Why boasteth thou thyself, thou tyrant," Satan, "that thou canst do mischief;

"Whereas the goodness of God endureth yet daily?

"Thy tongue imagineth wickedness, and with lies thou cuttest like a sharp razor.

"Thou hast loved unrighteousness more than goodness, and to talk of lies more than righteousness.

"Thou hast loved to speak all words that may do hurt, O thou false tongue.

"Therefore shall God destroy thee for ever." [2]

And Satan is only an instance on a splendid and superhuman scene of that which may take place, and does take place, within the compass of human life and experience,—of the gradual growth of the spirit of resistance to the known Will of God, which culminates at last, not in the triumph of the rebel, but in his being assigned a truly awful place in the plans of the Divine Providence, in which he only illustrates—not the Mercy, but the Justice of the Omnipotent.

[1] Ps. x. 8-12. [2] *Ib.* lii. 1-6.

(β) Next observe that some good natural qualities may exist in a man who nevertheless lives and dies as an opponent of the Will of God. There is an extant bust of the Pharaoh Meneptah in the great Boulak Museum of Antiquities at Cairo, which we are told may be considered an authentic portrait; and as we stand before the grave, but by no means unkindly, Coptic face, it is difficult to think that it represents a human being to whom the solemn and stern words were addressed, in the Name of the All-Merciful: "For this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee My power, and that My Name might be known in all the earth."

And yet that this is possible is a matter of experience. A man may be not merely respectable, but even interesting, and yet throughout his life opposed to the cause and honour of God, and the highest and truest interests of his fellow-men. This fatal opposition may be due to some secret warp of the will, or to some lack of sensitiveness in the conscience. History abounds with instances of men who, with good points in their character, have yet been, in the great struggle which is ever going on between good and evil, between God and that which opposes Him, on the wrong side.

And this spectacle is much more pathetic—I had almost said much more dreadful—than when a thoroughly bad man is opposing God. That Nero should burn the Christians by night, in the Gardens on the Janiculum, in order to amuse the Roman populace, and divert public attention from his own enormities,—that he should crucify St. Peter with his head downwards, and should behead St. Paul,—seems quite natural and in order, considering what sort of a person Nero was. But contrast Nero with the apostate Emperor Julian. Julian was all that Nero was not: he was brave, generous, self-denying, earnest; a high-toned soldier, a severe student; a man whom to

know was to respect, if not really to love. It is true that Julian had advantages which were unknown to Nero: he was brought up in the faith of our Lord and Saviour; he knew what the Christian life was and could be: he had opportunities of meeting men who deserved the name of Saints. Yet he not only deliberately rejected and scorned the faith of Christ, he bitterly persecuted it; he devoted his great powers to restoring, so far as he could, the expiring Paganism to its old place as the religion of the Roman world. He died, as you know, during an expedition into Central Asia, confessing, it is said, that the Galilæan, as he called our Lord, had been too strong for him. If he had been an idle, profligate sensualist, indifferent to human welfare and to human suffering, as were not a few of those who sat on the throne of the Roman world, his case would be less pathetic. It is his natural excellence which threw out into such sharp and painful relief the general drift of Julian's career, as that of one of the bitterest opponents whom our Lord Jesus Christ has had during the whole history of His Church. Julian seems, like Pharaoh, to have been raised up that the Crucified and Risen Redeemer might show in him His power, and that His Name might be declared throughout all the earth.

Let us be sure that this may very well occur in private life, and on a smaller scale. We are certainly changing as the years pass; but it does not follow that we are growing better because we are growing older. The growth may be little heeded by us, but in the other direction. Good natural qualities—industry, justice, temperance, kindliness, courage, even self-denial,—do not of themselves prove that a man is not living in opposition to God. They are consistent with a general drift of life which is opposed to His Will and is condemned by His Word. They are no guarantee that a man has that tenderness and sensitiveness of conscience,—that quick eye for God's truth and

honour, which will enable him to see the line of duty in difficult circumstances, and will save him from the misery of finding himself at the last among those who have fought against God. We must have known such people in life: we have, perhaps, reason to fear lest we should ourselves be of the number of petty Pharaohs, who will illustrate God's power rather than His mercy at the Day of Award.

(γ) Once more, Pharaoh's history bids us reflect how easily those who are in a superior or engrossing position may be fatally blind to the highest and dearest interests of others, who are, in whatever sense, subordinate to or dependent on them. Pharaoh, no doubt, had his head and his hands full of questions of high policy, of great affairs of state—too full, he may have thought, to give much time to the complaints of a tribe of Asiatic bondmen round his royal city. Their distress and their importunate petitions only inspired him with impatience and contempt: as Scripture puts it, "his heart was hardened;" he closed his eyes and his ears when he ought to have kept them wide open to all the indications of God's Will, and of human needs around him; and so he drifted on to his ruin. May not something of the same kind occur to any who are intrusted by God's Providence with the superintendence and care of others, not only to rulers of nations and churches, but to great employers of labour, to the heads of educational institutions, to fathers of families? An Israel may be close around them to whose real wants they are insensible, but of which they have had ample warning; and meanwhile time is passing, and they are approaching some catastrophe. The ruin of families, of societies, of institutions, may be due to some fatal insensibility on the part of those who direct them; some inability of entering into their moral and spiritual requirements.

Lastly, there is great comfort for those who desire to serve God, in the conviction that in the end He will triumph over His opponents—however long the triumph be delayed. This is implied in the words uttered by Moses to Pharaoh. Pharaoh was sitting on his throne in all the pride of the Egyptian monarchy in its proudest days, when Moses told him that he was raised up to be crushed, in order to set forth the power of God. God allows much evil to exist which is a distress and perplexity to His servants; they cannot understand why He should long submit to appear to be baulked and vanquished in His own world. Wait, and you will see that if God is patient it is because He is Eternal. Pharaoh must for a while be borne with, remonstrated with, instructed, frightened, warned—before the Red Sea closes upon him and his army. Still more sure of this should we Christians be, who are now still looking, with the Apostles of old, into the empty Sepulchre from which the stone has been rolled away, and know that He Who has left it is "the First and the Last;"[1] "He Who liveth, and was dead; and, behold, He is alive for evermore, and has the keys of hell and of death."[2] Sin may still be strong; death still terrible; Satan a standing menace. But we know Whom we have believed:[3] these enemies will only illustrate our Redeemer's power. We know Whom we have believed. "We can do all things, through Christ That strengtheneth us."[4]

[1] Rev. i. 11. [2] *Ib.* 18. [3] 2 Tim. i. 12. [4] Phil. iv. 13.

SERMON III.

THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF EGYPT.

Acts vii. 39.

In their hearts they turned back again into Egypt.

THIS is what St. Stephen says of the ancient Israelites in the great speech which he made before the Jewish Council just before his martyrdom. Throughout that speech he treats the early history of Israel, as the French would say, allusively; that is, he talks about the past while he is thinking of the present. This appears especially in the passage which refers to Moses. St. Stephen speaks of Moses, of his services to Israel, of his greatness as a servant of God, of the ingratitude he met with at the hands of his countrymen, but he is plainly thinking of our Lord Jesus Christ, Whose Ministry, Death, and Resurrection were so recent, and so notorious in Jerusalem. "This," he cries, "is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A Prophet shall the Lord raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; Him shall ye hear. This is he, that was in the Church in the wilderness with the Angel which spake to him in the Mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us." And then he adds, "To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt."[1]

In these last words St. Stephen implies that the Jews,

[1] Acts vii. 37-39.

who rejected and crucified our Blessed Saviour, were also turning their hearts and minds away from the true meaning of God's Revelation to Moses, away from that knowledge of the true Messiah which, properly considered, it had to give them, and back into a time of comparative darkness —a mental and moral Egypt from which they had been in a fair way altogether to escape. This is what he means his hearers, the members of the Jewish Council there sitting before him, to understand; but it may be useful for us this afternoon to consider the historical fact in which he clothes his warning, the strong sympathy and admiration which was felt for Egypt by the ancestors of his audience. It was one of those facts in their past history which was more or less unwelcome to the Jews of St. Stephen's day, and therefore more or less likely to be lost sight of; and accordingly St. Stephen drags it out of obscurity into prominence; he wishes to suggest its great and permanent significance; he would have his hearers ask themselves the question whether something might not be taking place now, or have taken place quite recently, which showed that they, sitting there before him, were the true descendants of the men who centuries before, in their hearts, turned back again into Egypt.

I.

The fascination which Egypt had for the Hebrew mind appears even before the fugitive Israelites had crossed the Red Sea. It was the fascination at once of terror and of admiration which made their hearts turn back into Egypt. As they passed out from the fertile lands which had been their home for four centuries and more, into the desert whose very aspect seemed to threaten exhaustion and death, their thoughts reverted to the vast burial-ground above Memphis, along the ridge of the Western Desert,—

perhaps to the unnumbered tombs which are found in almost every hill and valley along the course of the Nile. "Is it," they cried to their great leader bitterly, "is it because there were no graves in Egypt that thou hast taken us away to die in the wilderness? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness."[1]

"It was well with us," they cried at Taberah,—"it was well with us in Egypt."[2] "Would to God," they exclaimed at the report of the spies, "that we had died in the land of Egypt! Were it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt."[3]

It may be said that it was the terror of the pursuit, the desolation of the wilderness, the bodily hunger, the dread of the fierce tribes with whom encounter was inevitable, that explains this willingness to return to Egypt; but at any rate these apprehensions did not always last, and it is the strong positive attraction which Egypt had for the Hebrews which appears at later stages of their history. It is seen in Solomon's marriage with the daughter of the reigning Pharaoh; in the welcome which even an ill-conditioned person, like Jeroboam, seeks and finds at the Egyptian court; in the tendency, rebuked first by Isaiah, then by Jeremiah and Ezekiel, on the part of the Jewish people, "to go down to Egypt for help"[4]—"to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt."[5] Jeremiah's ministry indeed was a long struggle against this fatal propensity: but it survived the Captivity and the Dispersion: Egypt became the home of a large colony of Greek-speaking

[1] Exod. xiv. 11, 12. [2] Numb. xi. 18. [3] *Ib.* xiv. 2-4.
[4] Isa. xxxi. 1. [5] *Ib.* xxx. 2.

Hebrews, and the descendants of the Patriarchs counted for more in Alexandria, the capital of the Ptolemies, than they had counted for in Zoan-Rameses, the northern capital of the Pharaohs.

And this fascination is the more remarkable because the treatment which Israel experienced at the hands of the rulers of Egypt, almost from the first, was that of an enemy, frequently cruel, and always unscrupulous. The patriarchs indeed had been welcomed as settlers in Egypt by kings who, although Egyptians to all outward appearances, in language and in habits, were in reality Asiatic invaders, who had conquered the Delta, and gradually extended their sway over Upper Egypt. They are known in history as the shepherd-kings; and their capital, more nearly related than any other Egyptian city to the history of Israel, was Zoan in the Delta. They welcomed all Asiatics like Jacob and his sons, as strengthening their own position in a country which they ruled with difficulty. Of these kings the Pharaoh Apophis, the friend of Joseph, and in whose name Joseph administered the country, was nearly, if not quite, the last. He had scarcely passed away—if he had passed away—when the subject rulers of Thebes, in Upper Egypt, rose in revolt, and, after a great struggle, expelled the shepherd-kings from Egypt, and then poured their armies across Asia, almost, if not quite, as far as the Euphrates. In the eyes of these new rulers, the Israelites were not guests who had been invited to become subjects; they were the foreign dependants of a detested and expelled dynasty; and they sank at once from the position of subjects to that of slaves. Not one, but a long line of kings appeared upon the scene, that "knew not Joseph."[1] The 18th dynasty, including that greatest of Egyptian conquerors, Thothmes III., whose obelisk now stands on

[1] Exod. i. 8.

the Thames Embankment, reigned for two hundred years and passed away, before the great heat of the Oppression began, with the third king of the 19th dynasty, Rameses II. Rameses saw, or thought he saw, in the Hebrew settlers in Goshen, in the penetrating influence of Hebrew genius, a danger for the later order of things in Egypt; and hence the desperate attempt to crush out the life of a people by forced labour. Zoan was rebuilt, under the new name of Rameses, by the Hebrew slave population,[1] who for eighty years experienced all the hardships described in Exodus, until, in the days of Meneptah, the son of Rameses, the great deliverance came.

As Egypt endeavoured to crush the children of the patriarchs, so, in a later day, Egypt shattered the work of David and Solomon. It was at the court of the Egyptian king that Jeroboam matured his schemes for a rebellion,[2] which issued in the secession of the ten tribes. It was the Egyptian monarch Shishak, or Sheshonk, who captured the cities of Judah and the Levitical cities in Israel that were loyal to the House of David; who plundered Jerusalem, confiscated the treasures not only of the Palace, but of the Sanctuary,[3] and engraved the story of his triumph on the walls of the great temple at Carnac, where, in confirmation of the Bible narrative, it may be seen and read at this very day.

Not to mention the invasion of Judah by the Pharaoh Zerah, who was defeated by king Asa,[4] it may here suffice to recall the defeat and death of the good king Josiah at Megiddo, at the hands of Pharaoh Necho.[5] Certainly, for reasons of her own, the force of which was apparent enough two generations later, Egypt was willing and prepared to assist Hezekiah against the Assyrian Sennacherib:[6] but on the whole, her treatment of the

[1] Exod. i. 11. [2] 1 Kings xi. 40. [3] *Ib.* xiv. 25, 26.
[4] 2 Chron. xiv. 9-13. [5] *Ib.* xxxv. 20-24. [6] Isa. xxx. 1, 2.

chosen people was anything but friendly. Yet, for all that, again and again, during the course of their history, Israel's heart turned back again into Egypt.

II.

It is worth our while to consider the causes of this fascination, thus exerted by Egypt upon the imagination and mind of Israel during so many centuries, and in spite of so many injuries which might, as we should think, have broken the spell.

(*a*) One cause, which told with great effect, especially during the wanderings in the Desert, was the productiveness of Egypt,—a productiveness which was immediately due to its wonderful river, the Nile, which washes down a rich soil from the highlands of Abyssinia, and then at its yearly inundation distributes soil over the whole surface which the water covers. No artificial manure is required to enrich the soil: no part of it need lie fallow: all that is needed is that the ground so prepared should be assisted by irrigation. This was well understood by the Egyptians many centuries before the Exodus.

Only in those ancient days much more of what had been desert was under cultivation than is the case at present; the population supported was much greater, and the products were much more various than now. What these were may be learnt in some measure from the sculptures on the tomb of Ti, chamberlain and privy-councillor to a king of the 5th dynasty, and who therefore lived some 1500 years before Moses. The sculptures are a complete picture of ancient Egyptian life, and especially of agricultural life, and they show how, in that remote age, the valley of the Nile was turned to the best account. To the same effect an Egyptian poet describes Zoan, the main scene of the oppression of the Israelites in the days of the oppressor Rameses II.

"I arrived," he says, "at the city of Rameses-mi-Amen. It is beautiful. Nothing is like it among the monuments of Thebes; it is the very secret of the pleasures of life. The fields are full of lovely spots, abounding in the produce of food; the pools are full of fish, the ponds of ducks; the meadows are green with herbage, the bowers with blooming garlands. The granaries are full of wheat and barley, heaped up as high as the heavens; vegetables and reeds are in the garden of herbs; flowers for nosegays in the fruit-house; lemons, citrons of two kinds, and figs, in the orchard; sweet wine there is, which is to be mixed with honey; fish, too, of various kinds, some even from the Euphrates." Then he goes on to describe a festival in which the king takes part.[1]

With this we may compare the description in Genesis of the plain of the Lower Jordan, before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrha, as "the garden of the Lord, well watered everywhere, even as the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar."[2] And this may illustrate the cry of the Israelites at Taberah: "We remember the fish which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: but now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, besides this manna, before our eyes."[3]

True, they were going to a land flowing with milk and honey,[4] a land where every man was to sit under his vine and his fig-tree;[5] a land rich with the verdure of Sharon and the Philistine plain, and with the valleys of Ephraim, and the hills of Naphtali, and the sub-tropical beauty of the Lower Jordan. But for all that, the land of the Nile had in their eyes no rival: the flesh-pots of Egypt[6] were, beyond all doubt, one cause of its attractiveness to the Hebrews.

[1] Poole, *Cities of Egypt*, pp. 83, 84. [2] Gen. xiii. 10. [3] Numb. xi. 5, 6.
[4] Exod. iii. 8. [5] 1 Kings iv. 25. [6] Exod. xvi. 3.

(β) But another cause is to be found in the character of Egyptian civilisation—using that word in its narrow, popular, and material, as distinct from its larger and nobler, in other words, its moral sense. In Egypt human life was embellished and surrounded with beauty and comfort, such as would naturally have impressed a comparatively rude people like the Hebrews. In respect of all the outward appliances and adornments of life, the Hebrew people was less civilised than the Philistines; much less civilised than the Egyptians. When the Hebrews became settled, and built cities and a temple, everything was on a smaller and less splendid scale than they had left behind them in Egypt. We know from the tombs and temples how rich and varied were Egyptian art and culture: such a tomb as that of Rameses III. at Thebes displays a wealth of domestic refinement which, in some respects at any rate, even modern ingenuity and luxury have not surpassed. Our grandest Cathedrals are dwarfed by the Hall of Columns in the Temple of Carnac: and we have never even attempted to rival such structures as the Pyramids, as probably we never shall know how they were built. Many centuries before the Exodus, Egyptian kings like Amenemha III., of the 12th dynasty, established a complete system of dykes, canals, locks, and reservoirs, by which the inundations of the Nile were regulated; or they excavated vast artificial lakes like Mœris in the Fayoum, to receive the overflowing waters, and so to secure a supply during the dry season for a vast extent of adjacent country. Egypt too, long before the Israelites sojourned there, had its literature and its seats of learning: Pentaur and Amenemapt were poets, contemporaries of Moses, whom he probably met at the Egyptian court: and On, or Heliopolis, the Great Temple of the Setting Sun, before which originally our obelisk on the Embankment stood, and where the patriarch Joseph married his

wife Asenath, was also an University, in which astronomy, geometry, arithmetic, mechanics, the principle and practice of law, and probably two languages at least, were studied—where Moses learned, as in a later age Plato and Eudoxus learned, all the wisdom of the Egyptians.[1] It is impossible to do more than touch the fringe of this vast subject—the culture and enterprise and artistic wealth of ancient Egypt. When in 1857 an Indian Chief was asked by his friends why he did not join in the mutiny against the British rule in India, he is reported to have said, "I have stood on London Bridge." And if an ancient Israelite could say, "I have stood on the ridge of the Libyan desert, and have looked down on Memphis or on Thebes," it might explain the feeling, almost amounting to awe, with which the member of the less civilised race would have regarded that vast and varied and elaborate civilisation. Only when we consider the material resources, the splendour, the wealth, the refinement of life in ancient Egypt, can we do justice to the astonishing enterprise of Moses—an enterprise which surely must have failed had he not been fortified by supernatural aid as well as by a moral sense of right. Only when we study the records of this wonderful past and reconstruct in thought and imagination this strong and brilliant civilisation, do we comprehend the subtlety and the strength of the fascination which Egypt may well have had for the Israelites of the Exodus and their successors.

(γ) A third reason of the attraction exerted by Egypt on the Hebrew mind was its antiquity. The veneration for antiquity, especially antiquity in association with human history, is a natural and a legitimate sentiment: indeed, not to feel it is to lack some of the finer elements of a well-balanced mind. The interest which is taken in an old country is an extension of the reverence which is

[1] Acts vii. 22.

paid to age in the individual man. Tokens of national antiquity, like a hoary head, are—if other things more important be not wanting—a crown of glory, a title to veneration. It is felt, too—this veneration,—not only or chiefly by scholars, or poets, or historians, but by large masses of men, and by men of a practical and utilitarian type of mind. Look at the Americans who come to visit us every summer in increasing numbers; what is it in England or in Europe that interests them most? Not, most assuredly, our manufactures, or our shipping, or our great public works: in these fields of enterprise they are always our rivals, sometimes our superiors. That which attracts them is a possession which a people cannot buy with money or compass by industry, since it is the gift of time,—the institutions, the buildings, the pictures, the books, that carry them back to a past of which a new country cannot boast. In their eyes our older literature, our ancient towns, our castles, our cathedrals, have a charm which they sometimes lack in the eyes of Englishmen: it might almost seem that to know the value of an ancient past, it were necessary to have no share in it.

Well, Israel, as we may think, was sufficiently ancient; and it conquered and inhabited much more ancient cities, one of which, Hebron,—it is expressly said in the book of Numbers,[1]—was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt; but, as compared with Egypt, it was but of yesterday. Before we consider what Egyptian antiquity really was, it is well to remember that the dates at the top of the margin of our Reference Bibles, especially in the Book of Genesis, are not part of the Bible itself. They were placed there by learned men in days when much less was known about the ancient world than is the case now, and there is no religious necessity to take their truth for granted. In point of fact, human history goes much

[1] Numb. xiii. 22.

further back in the scale of time than those dates would lead us to suppose; and this is especially true of Egyptian history. Homer knew of no city in the world so great as the Egyptian Thebes, with her hundred gates,—Thebes, the magnificence and the ruin of which by the Assyrian king, Assurbanipal, is described by the prophet Nahum. Yet when Homer wrote, Thebes had been declining for at least three centuries; it had been a great city before the days of Abraham. And Thebes was modern when compared with Memphis, the more northern capital of Egypt, in whose vast burial-ground the Pyramids of Ghizeh were and are the most conspicuous tombs. In bygone days it used to be supposed that those Pyramids were built by the Children of Israel during the Oppression. Now we know that when Moses saw them they had been where they still are for at least sixteen, probably for not less than nineteen, centuries, that is to say, for as long a time as separates us to-day from the appearance of our Lord upon the earth. They were ancient structures in the eyes not merely of Moses, and Joseph, but of the patriarch Abraham; some five royal dynasties at least had arisen and had passed away since they were built, when Abraham saw them. Now the second of these Pyramids was founded by a king whose statue was discovered some few years ago in an adjoining temple, and is now preserved in the Boulak Museum at Cairo. It is probably the oldest royal statue in existence. It is sculptured out of a material so hard that our modern artists rarely, if ever, attempt to employ it; and yet with a truth of form and outline which excites the admiration of the greatest European anatomists. Art does not arrive at the excellence which it has reached in the statue of King Cephren in a day: such a work implies a long course of preceding labour and training; and thus arises a vista of a yet higher antiquity, the limits of which it is

impossible to fix with our present knowledge—or even to conjecture.

(δ) A last element of the fascination of Egypt for the Hebrew mind was its religion. This religion, as we know, contained, like all Pagan systems, some elements of truth, and large elements of falsehood. The worship described by St. Paul when writing to the Romans, of "birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things,"[1]—of the hawk, the ibis, the bull, the cat, the crocodile, the sculptured forms of deities, still to be seen in our museums and on the walls of ruined Egyptian temples, and which to us seem at first sight unintelligible and hideous, was but the development in a later time of a religious idea, which at first recognised the Deity everywhere in Nature, and then identified Him with it, and strove to give personal, and even bodily form to His actions within it. In Ancient Egypt the same process went forward, as may be observed in certain regions of modern thought: Theism sank to Pantheism, and Pantheism, burying the Eternal Spirit within the folds of matter, sank more and more nearly to the level of Fetichism. This will explain the absence of the forms of the Egyptian deities in the earliest Egyptian sculptures: it was not, as has been mistakenly asserted, that in the earliest times the Egyptians had no object of worship, no religion at all, but that the later personifications of the action of Deity through Nature, through the Sun, or the Nile, or the varied activities of the animal world, had not yet been developed, as they were in or before the days of the 18th dynasty—some two centuries before the lifetime of Moses. The Egyptians were always a naturally religious people; no people of the ancient world were so possessed with the idea of man's immortality. Their splendid tombs and pyramids were not the product of a vulgar ostentation; they were a costly and perpetual pro-

[1] Rom. i. 23.

fession of faith in a future after death. In the absence of Revelation, the Egyptians had to trust to imagination for guidance through the sombre regions of the unseen world: and it is easy to smile at the pictures in which the destiny of the soul after death, and before the throne of Osiris, is conjecturally pourtrayed by the Egyptian artists; but the fact of the belief is independent of all mistakes in its detailed expression.

Egyptian religion was a conglomerate of truth and falsehood: and Israel felt its influence in more ways than one. All commerce with its worship of animate or inanimate nature was strictly forbidden by the Second Commandment: but we cannot mistake the influence of Egyptian models on the form of the Temple, or even of the Ark of the covenant, or other details of the Levitical system. Inspiration here has selected what was good in heathendom, just as the first chapter of St. John's Gospel and the Nicene Creed alike consecrate certain fragments of the language of the Platonic philosophy. Taken as a whole, the religion of Egypt was, with its many, and some of them debasing, errors, the religion of a great and serious people; and, as such, it contributed one powerful element to the fascination which Egypt exerted over the mind of Israel. On two great occasions its power was indeed apparent with fatal effect. The first was when Aaron, in the absence of Moses on Sinai, made a golden calf out of the ear-rings of the people;[1] the second when Jeroboam, with a political rather than a devotional object, erected the two calves at Bethel and Dan.[2] In these cases the figure was doubtless suggested by the Egyptian worship of the sacred bulls, Apis or Mnevis: but to attach to the High and Holy One That inhabiteth eternity[3] the symbol of an occult physical force was unspeakably degrading. As a Psalmist said of the first of these great apostasies, the

[1] Exod. xxxii. 1-6. [2] 1 Kings xii. 26-29. [3] Isa. lvii. 15.

Israelites "turned their glory into the similitude of a calf that eateth hay."[1]

The influence of Egypt upon Israel might be traced in later ages, especially at Alexandria, and it would be interesting to follow the history of a country, in which England has of late had so large a stake, down to our own times. But the only reasons which justify now and here such consideration of Ancient Egypt as has already occupied us, would be thus lost sight of. Egypt, as presented to us in Scripture, is not only, or mainly, an historical study. When St. Stephen spoke, the Egypt of the Pharaohs had long forfeited independent existence; the Cæsars who ruled it had but subjugated its earlier conquerors. But the Egypt of spiritual experience, which attracts souls by its manifold seductions to return to some mental or moral bondage—this Egypt remains. The Egypt of history is the leading type of an influence, never wanting in human life, an influence which haunts the human soul even when making its best efforts to hold communion with a higher world. The Psalmist couples Rahab, that is, Egypt, with Babylon.[2] St. John couples it with Sodom, as a mystic name of the great city of the ungodly world-power, where also our Lord was crucified.[3] Egypt is a standing type of this world-power, ever hostile to the higher manifestations of the presence and kingdom of God, and from which, in all ages, elect souls must make their escape towards the Land of Promise, only, it may be, to reach that land after long wanderings in some intellectual or moral desert. Often to such will the past, which they have renounced, recur as though transfigured and idealised by memory; often will they have misgivings whether the better part of Mary was not for them at least a Quixotic enterprise; often will they be tempted, like Israel of old, in their hearts, if not

[1] Ps. cvi. 20. [2] *Ib.* lxxxvii. 3. [3] Rev. xi. 8.

more decidedly still, to turn back into Egypt. For the Egypt from which the Israel of our day escapes is, like its prototype, undeniably attractive: it has its good points; it combines many recommendations: perhaps it satisfies man's lower appetites; perhaps it addresses itself to his sense of beauty and refinement: and it has been in possession, more or less, ever since human society has existed at all; it even has a religion of its own, not wholly corrupt and false, but cleverly lowered down and adapted to the average instincts of human nature:—

> "A creed for every clime and age,
> By mammon's touch new-moulded o'er and o'er."[1]

And thus it has a fascination which is not invariably kept at bay by high spiritual office, such as was Aaron's, or by exceptional wisdom, such as was Solomon's, or by any such peculiar endowment of good sense or good feeling as is sometimes attributed to a multitude of men, such as was that which apostatised at the foot of Sinai. Referring to some who under his own eyes yielded to its seductive power, St. Peter speaks with apostolic plainness:—"If," he says, "after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."[2]

Brethren, an Egypt, let us be sure, is always behind us, "strangers and pilgrims,"[3] who are making our way towards the heavenly Canaan. It has very powerful attractions

[1] *Lyra Apostolica*, c. [2] 2 Pet. ii. 20-22. [3] Heb. xi. 13.

indeed for many of us; some attractions for all. At its best the ancient Egypt had nothing that could compare in value with the treasure committed to Israel—God's Revelation of Himself;—and nothing that can be offered by the world which inherits its characteristics to-day can compare with the knowledge and love of our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet how can we escape its subtle power save by loyal devotion to Him Who spoke of old to Israel by Moses, and Who in these later centuries has been "made Flesh, and dwelt among us,"[1] and died for us on the Cross; or till we learn, like the great lawgiver, to "esteem even the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt"?[2] Surely no baits to the senses can compete with "the things which God has prepared for them that love Him."[3] The richest embellishment of man's outward life can but pale before Him Who is the Uncreated Beauty. The most remote antiquity is but a second of time when measured against the years of the Eternal. The most reassuring religion will fail us if it will not stand the judgment of that day when, in Isaiah's stern words, "the idols of Egypt shall be moved at His Presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it."[4] May He enable us to choose the better part, to endure whatever there be of discouragement or hardship in His service, seeing, like Moses, Him That is invisible.[5] Above all, may we learn to watch and guard the issues of our hearts, convinced that He only has a right to their best affections, Who has said not less solemnly of the redeemed than of the Redeemer, "Out of Egypt have I called My Son."[6]

[1] St. John i. 14. [2] Heb. xi. 26. [3] 1 Cor. ii. 9.
[4] Isa. xix. 1. [5] Heb. xi. 27. [6] Hos. xi. 1; St. Matt. ii. 15.

SERMON IV.

THE DEATH OF AARON.

NUMBERS XX. 27, 28.

And Moses did as the Lord commanded: and they went up into Mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation. And Moses stripped Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son: and Aaron died there in the top of the mount.

THE close of the wanderings of the Children of Israel in the wilderness was marked by the deaths in succession of the three eminent members of that Levitical family who were, in God's providence, appointed to inspire and guide His people during this anxious period of their history. Miriam died before her brothers, at Kadesh-barnea,[1] on the southern frontier of the promised land. Moses died last, after completing his work, on the very brink of the Jordan. He went up to the heights of Pisgah, beheld at his feet the land of promise, and then died—alone; buried, no man knew where, by unseen hands.[2] Between the two came the death of Aaron, as described in the First Lesson for this afternoon.[3]

After Miriam's death, the Israelites, hoping to find their way through Edom round to the eastern frontier of Canaan, had moved eastward to that great mountain valley of loose sand, gravel, and granite rocks which runs in a southerly direction from the Dead Sea, and which travellers know as the Arabah. It is a sufficiently wild

[1] Numb. xx. 1. [2] *Ib.* xxxiv. 1-6. [3] The Second Sunday after Easter.

and unattractive region; here and there are a few low shrubs, near the mouths of the smaller valleys, or along the ravines created by the winter-torrents. But generally all is bare; and now and then a fierce sand-storm will sweep up from the south, lasting for a whole day or more, and making it easy to understand how "the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way."[1] There is not a cloud, but the sun is quite hidden by the fine dust which fills the air; all objects but those nearest to you are lost to view; the sand sweeps along the surface of the ground like sheets of water in one of our heaviest English storms; it beats upon the face like a hot sleet, filling the eyes, the nostrils, the mouth, with its penetrating and stifling, but exquisitely fine grains. To move forward in the face of it is wellnigh impossible: it must have its course; and man and beast must lie down and protect themselves as best they may until its tyranny be overpast. Such a storm, like sudden and severe cold in our own climate, will sometimes sow the seeds of rapid disease, especially in those whose constitutions are weakened by years and by toil.

And the most striking feature in the Arabah is the noble mountain on its eastern side, close to the far-famed Petra,—the desert city, whose clifts, tombs, and temples make it unlike any other in the world. This is Mount Hor. It rises to a height of some 5000 feet above the Mediterranean; a dark, red, bare rock, with two striking summits, which are seen, like the Malverns—only with a much sharper outline,—far and near. The Israelites were encamped at the western base of Mount Hor, and had just been thrown into deep discouragement by the refusal of the Edomites to grant a passage through their territory, when the event which is now before us occurred —Aaron died.

[1] Numb. xxi. 4.

I.

The first and more superficial aspect of death is that it is the close of a career. What kind of career was it that was brought to a close when Aaron died?

1. First of all, there can be no question as to its prominence. In the great work of leading the Children of Israel out of Egypt to the confines of the promised land, Aaron is only second to Moses. Although the younger man, Moses, in virtue of Divine appointment, as well as of personal character, was the leader: nay, as St. Paul tells the Galatians, he was even a mediator between God and his people:[1] he approached God on their behalf, and he conveyed to them God's Revealed Mind.

But Aaron was the elder brother: and if in this case, as in that of the first Napoleon, the personal endowments and achievements of a younger man entirely reversed, even in the eye of mankind, the prestige attaching to earlier birth, there were still certain respects in which Aaron took the lead. Aaron, we are told, could speak well, while Moses was slow of speech.[2] Thus Aaron was providentially appointed to be the spokesman for his brother; his prophet, his interpreter; literally, his mouthpiece. If Moses furnished the ideas and plans of action, Aaron clothed them in the language which would explain and recommend them. If Moses was the receiver of God's revelations, he made them known to others through his more eloquent brother. It was Aaron who spoke during the interviews with Pharaoh; it was Aaron who generally addressed the Israelites; nay, Aaron was the immediate worker of many of the miracles which preceded the Exodus. A striking illustration of Aaron's relation to Moses occurs during the critical battle with the Amalekites, when Aaron and Hur supported the weary

[1] Gal. iii. 19. [2] Exod. iv. 10, 14-16.

hands of Moses as they were lifted up to procure the victory of Israel.[1] It may happen that those who cannot themselves lead may be strictly indispensable to those who can. If Aaron could never have taken the place of Moses, Moses would not have been what he was without the sympathy and support of Aaron. If Moses ranks before Aaron, Aaron can never be dissociated from Moses: Aaron shares with Moses, though as a subordinate, the glory of having ruled and shaped the course and conduct of his countrymen, at a time of unexampled difficulty, and pregnant with the highest consequences to the religious future of the world. Samuel, when solemnly reviewing the history of his people, places them thus side by side. "It is the Lord," he says, "that advanced Moses and Aaron."[2] "Thou leddest Thy people," sings a later Psalmist, "like sheep, by the hand of Moses and Aaron."[3]

2. But Aaron's place in religious history is more distinctly measured, if we consider the great office to which he was called. He was the first of a long line of men who were at the head of what was for ages the only true religion in the world. He was the first of the High Priests of the Chosen People. That he was to be consecrated to this new office, and how he was to be consecrated, was a matter of special revelation to Moses;[4] and in this Aaron illustrates the principle, which is as applicable to Christian as to Jewish times, that, as the Apostle says, "no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron."[5] Moses, indeed, inaugurated him; but in this Moses acted, not as the civil ruler of Israel, but as a mediator between God and His people, as the immediate organ of God's revelation of His Will; so that in the view of later Israel, Moses as well as Aaron were among His Priests, just as Samuel was among those that

[1] Exod. xvii. 8-12. [2] 1 Sam. xii. 6. [3] Ps. lxxvii. 20.
[4] Exod. xxviii, xxix.; xl. 13-16. [5] Heb. v. 4.

call upon His Name.[1] It was indeed a solemn rite in which the man was first cleansed from transgression by the sin-offering, and completely devoted to God's service by the burnt-offering, and expressed thankfulness for God's gifts by the meat-offering, before he was arrayed in the special priestly robes,—the symbols of righteousness,—the ephod, the breastplate, and the mitre, and anointed with the precious ointment upon the head, which, as a token of God's rich gifts of ministerial grace, ran down, as men noted in later times,[2] unto the beard, even unto Aaron's beard, and went down unto the skirts of his clothing; and, lastly, sprinkled with the blood of consecration, which set apart all men or things on which it fell for God's exclusive service. If Aaron's consecration was of itself calculated to awe the mind of Israel, it was followed by high sanctions of his office, which would have done so still more. His own sons, Nadab and Abihu, died for offering strange fire on the altar;[3] and Korah's ambitious and selfish rebellion against his authority was visited with swift and unsparing punishment.[4] No High Priest in later days could occupy so great a place as did he who was the first of all: and when Aaron died, Israel, during the thirty days of mourning, must have felt that the greatest of Israelites but one had been withdrawn from sight.

3. Office, however, and position are one thing; character is another. And if it is here that we observe a great difference between the brothers, we must first of all remind ourselves that Aaron is called in Scripture the Saint of the Lord.[5] He must have had a great background of those high qualities which go to make up the saintly character, if he also had defects which lie on the surface of his life, and which are recorded for our warning and instruction.

[1] Ps. xcix. 6. [2] *Ib.* cxxxiii. 2. [3] Numb. iii. 2-4.
[4] Numb. xvi. 1-35. [5] Ps. cvi. 16.

Aaron was morally a weak man: he had no such grasp of principle as would enable him to hold out against strong pressure. His weakness became conspicuous on the critical occasion of Moses' going up Mount Sinai to receive the Sacred Law.[1] Aaron was then left below, in virtual command, in a position of responsibility to which, as the event proved, he was not equal. The Greeks had a proverb to the effect that leadership will show what a man is; and so it was with Aaron. Aaron had many great qualities, but he could not resist pressure; and the people whom he had to guide put sudden and hard pressure upon him. Their imaginations were still haunted by the religion which they had witnessed in Egypt,—ancient, splendid, stately, mysterious,—a religion the grosser features of which were recommended by a subtle pantheism which it was beyond the popular wit to analyse: and so they thought that they would be safe in their passage through the howling wilderness if Aaron would make them gods to go before them,—figures of some one of the many animals in which the Egyptians traced some department of the Divine activity. When Aaron made the calves he had in his mind, no doubt, the Egyptian bulls Apis or Mnevis; the living embodiments of the vivifying power of Nature; only he hoped to attach these symbols to the worship of the God of Israel, and so to prevent the people from becoming downright idolaters. The compromise was, of course, as religious compromises generally are, a betrayal,—a betrayal of the truth which it was Aaron's business to guard: the calves retained in the mind of Israel their old associations, and the feast of the Lord became a heathen revel. The anger of Moses was the measure of the dishonour which Aaron's weakness had done to Almighty God;[2] the covenant was broken, the religious life, the discipline, built up by long and patient

[1] Exod. xxxii. 1-6. [2] *Ib.* xxxii. 19, 20.

toil, was for the time at an end. Aaron had illustrated the truth that, in certain circumstances, the good qualities of the weak may do more harm than the bad qualities of the wicked; nor is it inconsistent with this that Aaron could display obstinate self-assertion on inopportune occasions, as when he joined his sister Miriam in murmuring against Moses.[1] This is what weak people do: they give way when true loyalty to duty would teach them to resist, and then, haunted by the notion that they are weak, or at least that the world will think them so, they indulge in some form of spasmodic self-assertion which may remind us of the ungainly efforts that invalids will sometimes make to show that they are not so ill as their friends may think them. Aaron's weakness is implied in the allusion to his sympathy in the Epistle to the Hebrews: he could at least answer to that note of a true High Priest which consists in having compassion on the ignorant and on them that are out of the way, for that he himself also was compassed with infirmity.[2]

II.

And now the end had come.

(*a*) Moses and Aaron both knew that Aaron would die. It may have been that some hitherto unsuspected disease had shown itself in the constitution of the old man; it may have been, as has been suggested, that a sand-storm in the Arabah had withered up his decaying vitality. That Aaron would die might have been known from observation, as God often speaks to us through the wonted changes of the world of nature. But Aaron and Moses also knew why Aaron was to die, and on Mount Hor. If we knew enough we should all of us know that there is a reason in the Divine Mind for the hour at which, as for

[1] Numb. xii. 1, 2. [2] Heb. v. 2.

the means by which, every man departs this life. We all are interested in ascertaining, as exactly as we can, the physical reason for the death of those relations whom God removes from our sight. But behind the physical there is a moral reason, if we could only know it; and we may say with confidence, that in the Eyes of God, Who is the Perfect Moral Being, the moral reason counts for much more than the physical; in Aaron's case it is the moral reason alone that is noticed in the Bible. Sometimes a servant of God is taken away from the evil to come. Sometimes a wilful sinner has filled up the measure of his iniquities, and the hour of judgment sounds. Sometimes a life is prolonged to do one little piece of work which no other would do, and as soon as this is done, that life is withdrawn. Sometimes a life is cut short because it has forfeited the particular privilege which an extension of some weeks or months would bring to it. And this last was the case of Aaron. "And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in Mount Hor, by the coast of the land of Edom, saying, Aaron shall be gathered unto his people: for he shall not enter into the land which I have given unto the Children of Israel, because ye rebelled against My word at the water of Meribah." [1]

Aaron's share in the sin at Meribah was due to the want of firmness, which, as has been seen, was a feature of his character. The sin of Meribah was primarily the sin of Moses, when the people murmured at the want of water, and Moses, wearied by their perverseness, in the very act of relieving them, betrayed, both by what he said and by what he did, a temper unworthy of his high office, so that he "did not sanctify God in the eyes of the people." [2] As a later Psalmist reflects, "The people angered God at the waters of strife, so that He punished Moses for their sakes; because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake

[1] Numb. xx. 23, 24. [2] *Ib.* 12.

unadvisedly with his lips."[1] As for Aaron, he only did not check Moses: he acquiesced in what he must have known to be dishonourable to God: and this in a man with his spiritual responsibilities was a grave failure of duty—so grave as to forfeit his entry into the land of promise. Moses too, much more, had forfeited that high privilege: but the work which Moses had to do in the world was not yet done. Moses must lead God's people round the southern point of Mount Seir: he must conquer the Amorite kings, Sihon at the battle of Jahaz, and Og at the battle of Edrei, and take possession of the country east of the Jordan, from the Arnon to Mount Hermon: he must rule Israel a while from the plains of Moab—from the very brink of the Jordan, ere he may mount on Pisgah and behold the land which it is forbidden him to enter, and go to his rest. But Aaron's appointed work was done: and there was no reason for delaying his summons.

Here we are led to reflect on a subject which too often escapes notice. Many men, probably the majority of those who do not incur eternal loss, do yet from some flaw in the character, some warp or weakness of the will, fall more or less greatly short of what they might have been; of what natural powers and spiritual endowments and religious and other opportunities, might have made them, and were designed to make them, even in this world; and if here, then also hereafter, in that blessed world where there are many mansions. Even if by God's mercy in Christ we reach it, we may have to fill a lower rather than a higher place, further from the Eternal Throne than we might have been, but for some neglect of grace given, some compliance with what conscience condemned, some act or omission which has left upon the will and character that lasting impress which survives death. Aaron would have

[1] Ps. cvi. 32, 33.

crossed the Jordan but for his fatal acquiescence by silence in the sin at Meribah.

(β) There is much to be noticed in the account of the close of Aaron's life, but nothing is more worthy of our notice than his deliberate preparation for it. He did not let death come on him; he went out to meet it: the last scene was as much a matter of duty and business as his consecration to the High-Priesthood.

"The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up unto Mount Hor; and strip Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son; and Aaron shall be gathered unto his people, and shall die there." [1]

These were the instructions, as precise as if they had been issued, not in view of a natural death, but of a public execution. And the scene which followed is one of the most striking and pathetic in the whole history of Israel. The Divine order was obeyed. They set out from the camp of Israel in the desolate sandy valley: the two aged and the younger man,—Aaron, no doubt, leaning on his younger brother, whose natural force, some while after, was not abated, and on his son, now in the prime of life. They set out, and slowly made their way up the steep western side of Mount Hor; while the Israelites, encamped beneath, silent and awe-struck, watched them long and anxiously, till they were lost to sight. "And Moses did as the Lord commanded, and they went up into Mount Hor, in the sight of all the congregation." And now they had reached the summit of one of the two highest points of the mountain; Aaron was on his Pisgah, and he too would have taken a last look at the world which was presently to be fading from his view. Away to the east were the hills of Seir, through which the Edomites had refused a passage to Israel; and on the south, the wide and

[1] Numb. xx. 25, 26.

seemingly boundless expanse of the desert of the wanderings; and on the west, the line of hills that formed the southern boundary of Canaan, through which Israel had vainly endeavoured to force its way; and to the north, the Dead Sea, and the downs and bays and cliffs on its western bank, which one day were to mean so much for Judah. And no doubt his eye turned inward, too, at that solemn moment, and his conscience lay spread out like a landscape before that inward gaze, only less clearly than beneath the Eye of his God. A deathbed is like a mountain top for the survey of life, and the deserts through which we have wandered, and the barriers which have checked our progress, and the hopes, bright or dim, which have cheered us on, and the feebleness, and fear of man, and self-seeking, and petty vanity—if nothing more—which have spoiled so much that God meant for Himself, stand out in clear outline above the haze of the distant past. Doubtless it was with Aaron, as with any man who retains, along with a conscience that has not been benumbed or seared, the free exercise of the mind's powers in those most solemn moments which precede the greatest of all changes: doubtless it was with him as with others upon whom their position and work in life has entailed great responsibility for the real and lasting happiness or misery of their fellow-men. At such times the merely conventional no longer satisfies; standards of conduct that are only of human sanction are seen to be no longer applicable; the mental eye sees through and beyond the phrases which inclination or passion have hitherto interposed between it and the past; it sees the past more nearly, not as it has been wished to be, but as it was. At such times, the higher a man's place in the government or the social fabric of the State, or in the ministry of the Church, the more sincerely must he breathe the prayer: "If Thou, Lord, shouldst be extreme

to mark what is done amiss, O Lord, who may abide it?"[1]

But time was passing, and the last moments were at hand. So Moses, acting, as we know, under Divine instructions, stripped Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son. There was no doubt a two-fold motive in this act of Moses. It showed, first of all, that the office of the High-Priesthood did not depend on the life of any single man; that God was watching over the religious interests of His people; that His gifts and calling were, as the Apostle says, without repentance;[2] and that He provides for the due transmission of those spiritual faculties, which have been given that they may sustain the higher life of men from age to age. But it also reminded Aaron personally of the solemn truth of the solitariness of the soul in death. Not more than any other man can a high priest retain the outward position, the valued symbols of his great responsibility: he too shall carry nothing away with him when he dieth, neither shall his pomp follow him.[3] In some of our older Cathedrals there are still double monuments, in which some powerful bishop of a past age lies above, clad in his pontifical robes, with pastoral staff, and ring, and mitre, while below there is an emaciated naked figure, all but a skeleton, on which the worm is visibly preying, as it lies in the solitude and desolate humiliation of the tomb. This is the reality which the act of Moses must have carried home to the soul of Aaron. Death strips us of everything save that which, so far as we know, is by God's appointment indestructible—our undying personality, and that type of character which acts and habits, and the use or misuse of the supernatural grace of God, have, for good or evil, wrought into its texture. This indeed is inevitably, inseparably ours; all else is like the sacerdotal robes

[1] Ps. cxxx. 3. [2] Rom. xi. 29. [3] Ps. xlix. 17.

of Aaron,—to be abandoned at the place where and at the moment when we lie down to die.

(γ) It was all over. Aaron had closed his eyes. And Moses probably buried him where at this day a Moslem shrine, constructed out of the ruins of some earlier and finer edifice, still bears his name. It was all over, and, like a procession returning from a funeral, without the one object which had formed its chiefest interest—Moses and Eleazar, we are told, came down from the mountain.

What were their thoughts about Aaron? Where was he now? Aaron, so runs the phrase of Moses, was "gathered unto his people."[1] What does the phrase mean? It is used alike of Aaron and Moses.[2] Does it describe only the interment of their bodies? But, in either case, their bodies rested at a distance from their people, in a foreign land. Surely it points to a world in which the bygone generations of men still live: a world of the existence of which God's ancient people were well assured, though they knew much less of it than we. That world beyond the grave is indeed presented with different degrees of clearness in the successive ages of the Old Testament history. The age of the patriarchs is marked by strong and distinct faith in it. In the days and teaching of Moses it is more kept in the background, probably because the imagination of Israel was still haunted by the imagery of the underworld of the dead as the Egyptians conceived of it. In Job and some of the Psalms it is a subject sometimes of anxious discussion, sometimes of strong and undoubting faith. In the Prophets it comes prominently forward, as the promised Messiah is heralded, not merely as an earthly Ruler, but as a Deliverer from the consequences of sin. In Ezekiel and Daniel, we already meet with the Resurrection of the Body: in the writers after the Captivity this doctrine goes hand in hand

[1] Numb. xx. 24. [2] *Ib.* xxvii. 13.

with a distinct faith in the immortality of the soul. We may not doubt that as Moses and Eleazar slowly made their way down the western side of the mountain on which Aaron was left, their thoughts were not only or chiefly centred on the tomb which enclosed his body: they followed him into the assembly of the spirits of the dead, —with their sympathies, their hopes, their prayers,—even though around that world on which he had entered there hung a veil for them which has been removed for us.

Among the voices of our own day there are some which might suggest that we Christians, the children of the great Conqueror of Death, know less of what awaits us than did our Jewish predecessors. "From that world beyond the grave, if such there be," says one writer, "from that world none ever returns: and in vain do we listen for some voice which may replace conjecture and imagination by the certainties of knowledge. We listen but in vain. As we stand on the shore of the mighty ocean of death, that ocean which parts us from the unknown land beyond, we can hear only its far-off waves as they beat against the rocks of destiny with a monotonous sadness, in which the sighs of all the past generations of men that have been engulfed beneath its waters might seem to join." No! Christians, listen and you will hear from that further shore something more worthy of your instinctive sense of a great destiny, more human and reassuring, as well as more certain and Divine, than is this despairing moan: "If we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, even them also that sleep in Jesus shall God bring with Him."[1] The Old Testament is sometimes the foreshadowing of the New, sometimes its foil. If Aaron was stripped of his sacerdotal robes on the eve of death, Jesus was never more a Priest than when He hung upon His Cross, and offered Himself as "a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice,

[1] 1 Tim. iv. 14.

oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world."[1] If Aaron's dust still lies somewhere among the rocks of Horeb, awaiting the summons of Judgment, Jesus has indeed risen from the dead and become "the First-fruits of them that slept."[2] Nay, He has already "brought life and immortality to light."[3] He has taught us that there is a life, which through His Grace we may live, and the beauty of which our hearts cannot but own, while yet that life does but mock us, if it ends at death, if it does not last and expand hereafter. He has shown us how this life may be, if now it is not, ours; and in possessing it we are already and most assuredly more than conquerors of death, through Him That loved us.[4]

[1] *The Prayer of Consecration:* Order of the Holy Communion.
[2] 1 Cor. xv. 20. [3] 2 Tim. i. 10. [4] Rom. viii. 37.

SERMON V.

THE VALLEY OF ACHOR.

HOSEA ii. 15.

I will give . . . the valley of Achor for a door of hope.

NO Israelite, we may be sure, could have heard this language from Hosea without being deeply moved. It would have carried him back to the early history of his race, when, under Divine guidance, his forefathers were taking possession of the promised land. It reminded him of a great failure, and, as the word Achor means, of a great trouble and a great tragedy. It implied that history was repeating itself: that old sins were to be followed by old punishments, and that beyond these punishments there was hope. Israel in Hosea's day was largely apostate and idolatrous; it was again, morally and spiritually, although not literally, in Egypt, encompassed by and yielding to the attractive fascinations of a widespread idolatry. And the old sin was to be followed by the old discipline: "I will allure Israel, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope." Israel here, as so often in the Prophets, is addressed as the bride—too often the unfaithful bride—of the Lord Jehovah; and the wilderness from which vineyards were again to be given her, and the valley of Achor which was to be once more a door of hope, would have suggested

that while the generations and the centuries pass, God remains—unchanged in His purposes of mercy and of judgment, the Same everlastingly.

I.

"The valley of Achor!" It recalls those early days when, under the captaincy of Joshua, Israel was taking possession of the promised land. The memory of a deed of heroism or a deed of blood seems, in the minds of men, to hang about a narrow valley, as though the human imagination read in the hills or rocks, which close in on this side and on that, the eager witness of inanimate nature, pressing forward to express its mute sympathy with the champions of right or with the victims of cruelty. Had Glencoe been in the lowlands of Scotland its associations with one of the darkest crimes in the history of Great Britain would ere now perchance have been at least enfeebled; but a framework of natural beauty surrounds the scene of the tragedy, and condemns its authors to an earthly immortality of shame.

The valley of Achor lay along the line of Israel's advance from Jericho to Ai. When Jericho had fallen, the invading host of Israel moved on towards Ai, and three thousand men were sent forward to conquer it. As the entire population of Ai was only twelve thousand, it would have seemed that three thousand soldiers were advancing to easy victory. Yet the three thousand fled before the men of Ai, and this so suddenly and with so little effort at resistance that only thirty-six of them were slaughtered. The demoralisation of the Israelites was complete: "the hearts of the people melted, and became as water."[1] It was a critical moment, and Joshua lost no time in asking for guidance and help. He "rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the Lord until the

[1] Josh. vii. 5.

eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads."[1] He asked God, with reverent boldness, why so much had been done for Israel only that help might be withdrawn when it was needed most; and what would be said of Him, the Lord of Israel, if, after covenanting to give the people the land of Canaan, He should now permit Israel to be destroyed?

Joshua was told that it was a time for action rather than for prayer. If Israel had been smitten before the heathen, it was because Israel went into the battle in a moral condition answering to a perilous disease, and paralysed by the weakness that came with secret sin. We shall understand this if we remember that Israel was not only a nation; it was a church; and its wars, when they were in accordance with the Will of God, were carried on for moral and religious objects, just as the wars of the surrounding heathen were carried on for the prosecution of material interests. In conquering Canaan and destroying its inhabitants, Israel was carrying out a sentence of condemnation that had been passed upon a race quite exceptional in its corruption: and as Jericho was the first city of Canaan that was taken, it was "devoted,"—as our Authorised Version less happily renders it, "accursed,"[2]—in order to show that the conquest of the land was God's gift to Israel. Elsewhere the cattle and property became the booty of the victors: but Jericho was devoted as a first-fruits to God; with the exception of Rahab and her kindred, every living thing in it was to be put to death, and the spoils—silver and gold—were to be brought into the treasury of Israel.

Such was the order. But Joshua was warned that it had been disobeyed: some of the devoted treasures had been stolen, and the theft had been covered by deceit. If Israel had been merely a secular heathen people, the

[1] Josh. vii. 6. . . . [2] *Ib.* vi. 17.

moral character of its soldiery would have mattered less: as it was, sacrilege and lying meant, for Israel, physical weakness; and if the career of victory which had been begun was to continue, Joshua's first duty must be to discover and punish the offender. "For thus saith the Lord God of Israel: There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel: thou canst not stand before thine enemies until ye take away the accursed thing from among you."[1]

Then took place that solemn inquiry, which we all remember as children, as among the most stirring incidents of the Book of Judges. In the early morning the host was marshalled—tribe by tribe—in its social and military array, and the lots were drawn; they were drawn, as afterwards in the cases of Jonathan and Jonah, to discover the guilty. It was felt that on this occasion of such moment to the welfare of Israel, a Higher Power would preside; and that when the lot was cast into the lap, the whole disposing thereof would be from the Lord.[2] And so, as the quest proceeded from tribe to family, and from family to household, and then to its several members, the meshes closed more and more closely round the sinner who had brought on Israel such ruin and shame: the tribe of Judah, the family of the Zarhites, the household of Zabdi, were the steps by which discovery advanced towards Achan. Achan was Zabdi's grandson, and a person, it would seem, of substance and consideration. Joshua pressed Achan to glorify God by telling the truth; and Achan confessed that he had taken and hidden away a rich robe of Babylonish manufacture, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a solid wedge of gold. They were found, as Achan had said, hidden in his tent: and the proof of guilt was complete. And then what follows can only be told in the language of the Bible:—

"And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the

[1] Josh. vii. 13. [2] Prov. xvi. 33.

son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had; and they brought them unto the valley of Achor. And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the Lord shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones unto this day."[1]

II.

Achor, as you have observed, means trouble; and Joshua gave the valley its name, from the likeness of this word Achor to Achan. It was in truth a terrific act of penal retribution, by which Achan and his family met their death; and it requires an effort to ask ourselves how the spot which witnessed the scene of torture and of shame could be a door of hope.

(*a*) It was, first of all, a door of hope for Israel.

Achan's sin, while undiscovered, had this terrible distinction, that, in an eminent degree, it brought with it trouble, weakness, and ruin to the public cause of Israel. Israel was not whole-hearted while the Babylonish robe, which ought to have been burnt, and the gold and silver, which ought to have been placed in the treasury of the Lord, were sacrilegiously hidden away in the earth beneath Achan's tent. And a serious effort like the attack on Ai revealed the presence of a moral unsoundness somewhere, which, so long as it festered at the heart of Israel, made further progress impossible. When Achan had been discovered and punished, Israel's weakness disappeared: "The Lord turned from the fierceness of His anger,"[2] and Ai fell easily before the first assault.

[1] Josh. vii. 24-26. [2] *Ib.* 26.

Achan's sin was not, let us observe, an open scandal which brought dishonour on the cause of God by its publicity: it was not, in this respect, like the sin of the sons of Eli, who made the Lord's people to transgress,[1] or like the sin of Jeroboam, who made Israel to sin.[2] It was more akin to that of Ananias and Sapphira,[3]—not in its precise form, since Achan took what never had been his, and Ananias kept back a part of that which he had vowed to give to God,—but certainly in its motive, which was covetousness, and in the deceit which was employed to shield it, and in the fact that what was taken in the one case and kept back in the other, belonged to God, so that the theft had an aggravated character of sacrilege. Such secret sins are more common than public ones; they satisfy the sinful instinct more economically; and those who commit them are tempted to persuade themselves that because they do not corrupt others by the taint of bad example, they are really much more venial. Such would have been Achan's view of his case, no doubt: at least he had kept his wrong-doing to himself; he had not persuaded others to join in his sacrilege, and in concealing it, he was alone; he had not had fellowship with the deceitful.[4]

Ah! we often wonder why great causes fail or flag: why so little comes of schemes for doing good into which much heart has been thrown, and for which great sacrifices have been made: why the results are so poor and disappointing of enterprises or societies for propagating the Faith, or for setting on foot works of charity, or for maintaining the Christian character of education, or for improving public conduct in this respect or in that, or for carrying morality into legislation, or into the relations which nations professedly Christian have with each other. We count up, we measure, we lay stress on the difficulties

[1] 1 Sam. ii. 22-24.
[2] 1 Kings vii. 26-33; xiv. 16.
[3] Acts v. 1-4.
[4] Ps. xxvi. 4.

of the undertaking itself: we satisfy ourselves that these difficulties furnish the real reason of failure: Ai, we say, is too strong to be taken; its soldiers are more than a match for the men of Israel. May it not be all the while that the true cause of failure lies nearer home; that something is hidden away in the tent of the soul, hidden beneath the earth, which our conscience at least cannot forget; and that this fatal memory makes the heart sink, and unnerves the hand when the decisive time for action comes? And moral weakness is contagious; it radiates from soul to soul, as does moral force: we feel its presence by a sure instinct when we cannot give an account of it to others or to ourselves. And, in any case, those invisible beings who are the witnesses of all human efforts, and, above all, He Who is their Lord and ours, see well and clearly what is the case; and the enterprise is blessed or is rejected accordingly. Depend on it, dear brethren, that as the strength of the Church of Christ lies, not in her external circumstances, not in the support or countenance which she may receive from the great or the powerful, but in the secret prayers and deeds of souls whose names are unknown, it may be, on earth, but who are already registered in heaven, so the weakness of the Church lies not in the number or fierceness of her enemies, which God may and does turn to His praise,[1] but in the secret unbelief and sins of her children. Achan, Judas, Diotrephes, have a fearful power of traversing God's purposes of mercy: and perhaps, if we knew now, as one day we may hope to know, the secrets of the moral government of the world, we should see how God acts at times even now by His Providence, as of old by Joshua; how men are removed with swift decision from this earthly scene, because they bring to the cause of truth and goodness that moral paralysis and collapse which comes with cherished wrong-

[1] Ps. lxxvi. 10.

doing; and how their removal restores the public vigour and hope which their sin had forfeited. We dare not think of individuals: but the general laws of God's government do not vary; and the subject is full of warning for each one of us. None is too high, none too low, to promote or to weaken the cause of Christ in the world; and, *salus populi suprema lex*, the wellbeing of God's Israel from age to age is the law of God's government, and the valley of trouble for the individual wrong-doer is the door of hope for the Church, for the nation, for the race.

(*β*) But the valley of Achor may have been a door of hope for others than the survivors who passed on to the conquest of Ai.

The fate of the sons and daughters of Achan was one of the stock objections to this part of the Bible narrative which was urged by the Deists in the last century. And I suppose, that to a child reading the Bible for the first time, and with the interest which the narrative of this part of Scripture always possesses for children, it does seem hard sometimes that the sons and daughters of Achan were made to share the dreadful punishment of their guilty relative.

Here it is by no means sufficient to say, with a recent writer, that the history only illustrates "the sanguinary severity of Oriental nations, which has, in all ages, involved the children in the punishment of the father."[1] For the Jews had received a law which especially insisted on the sacredness of human life: and it is difficult to see how the slaughter in question was other than a crime against the Sixth Commandment, unless it could appeal to some principle which justified or explained it. It is indeed more than probable that Achan's family were accomplices in his sin: they must have been privy to the concealment of the stolen spoil in

[1] Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*, art. ACHAN.

the tent, and they knew what was involved in stealing and concealing it. But besides this, we cannot doubt Achan and his family are here regarded as forming, in some sense, a moral whole, and not simply as a set of individuals, each of whom was on his and her trial. Scripture does take these two views of human beings; sometimes it treats them as each one entirely separate from all besides, both in probation and in judgment; sometimes it merges the individual in a wider association of which he forms a part, whether it be the family, or the race, or the Church, or humanity,—merges him so completely as to treat him as though he were merely a limb of the great whole to which he belongs. And both of these views of man are true to and based on the nature of things: since man is, by the terms of his creation, at once a personal being complete in himself, and yet a part of a larger organism,—the human family. On the first of these aspects the Gospel, no doubt, especially insists; but it does not by any means ignore or dispense with the latter. When it tells us that "in Adam all die,"[1] and that "by one man sin came into the world, and death by sin,"[2] it treats every descendant of Adam as part of a family which is united in its natural head, and which is fatally compromised by the acts of its head. This principle of the reality of human nature explains our loss of righteousness in Adam, but it tells to our advantage even more decisively: it explains our recovery of righteousness in Christ. "In Christ shall all be made alive."[3] "As by the disobedience of one many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous."[4] How can this be, unless Christ too is the Head of a family which He endows with His righteousness, just as Adam endowed his descendants with a legacy of sin and death: a family which is united to Him by the gift of His New Nature, by the

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 22. [2] Rom. v. 12. [3] 1 Cor. xv. 22. [4] Rom. v. 19.

Spirit and the Sacraments, just as truly as the old and wider family is connected with Adam by the tie of natural life transmitted in the way of human generation? This principle of the solidarity of human beings tells for good as for evil: and just as Levi, though in the loins of his father Abraham, paid tithes in Abraham when Melchisedek met him,[1] so Achan's act compromised his family in a very real sense, which cannot be ignored without rebelling against the facts of nature as well as the teaching of Scripture.

For, putting Revelation altogether aside for the moment, do we not see the operation of this law, in the physical and social life of man, written in characters too plain to be mistaken? What means that inheritance of impoverished and diseased life, which a parent, whose frame has been shattered by excess and debauchery, bequeaths to children and to grandchildren who are as yet unborn? What means the transmission, with the gift of life, of moral character and predispositions—a transmission so certain as to have suggested the error that the personal soul itself is transmitted, instead of being only impressed by the transmitted organ which encases it? How can we deny that good or bad circumstances, the splendour of a great name or the utter loss of self-respect, are, whether we will or not, a fatal entail from parents to their children? There is no mistaking these facts of human nature; and when Christianity teaches us of an original sin descending from Adam, and of a gift of Righteousness descending from Christ, it grafts these high doctrines on facts which are already matters of experience, and which no true philosophy of human nature can ignore. Achan's children were involved in their father's guilt, on a somewhat like principle; as they had shared his credit and standing in the ranks of Israel, so they shared the shame and the pain of his fall.

[1] Heb. vii. 9, 10.

And yet, when this, and much more that might be said, has been said, a higher justice still asks whether the destruction of all the members of Achan's family is fully accounted for. Do not your hearts, my brethren, echo this repressed murmur? do they not whisper, "Your theology may be right, but there is something in our moral sense which is not altogether satisfied"?

The truth is, that we here see a deeper sense in which the valley of Achor was a door of hope. In order to explain the tragedy which it witnessed, we must resort to that larger conception of the destiny of man, which was affirmed, with varying degrees of distinctness, by the Jewish Revelation. If all ended with this life, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to explain occurrences of this sort consistently with a belief that the world is governed by an absolute and unerring Justice. It would seem as though there was no room in this visible world for such a Justice to take adequate measures, I will not say for self-vindication, but for self-satisfaction: and so that all is purposely left incomplete, with the intention of making belief in a future life inevitable for all who believe in a Moral Governor of the world. Certainly those who do not believe in a future after death are perfectly right in taking the gloomiest view of our present existence; while, on the other hand, faith in such a future enables us to understand how the tragedies of human life and history are consistent with the moral attributes of God. If any members of Achan's family were punished beyond the measure of their personal deserts in respect of Achan's crime, the valley of Achor was for them a door of hope—it suggested a future life in which all would be made up to them by a Just and Holy God.

No doubt, in later ages, the separate relation of every individual soul with God was more distinctly marked by Revelation. When Ezekiel's contemporaries complained

that "the fathers had eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth were set on edge," he proclaimed that the "soul that sinneth, it shall die;" and that "when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive."[1] And Christ our Lord yet further extricated the individual soul from the mass of human nature, and placed it face to face, in awful yet blessed solitude, with the Mercy and with the Justice of God. Each Christian is redeemed, as though Redemption had been wrought for him alone; each is to pass through death to judgment, as though the Judge of all the world had only to do with a single soul: and yet the law which makes us part of a vast family is not cancelled; since death is the legacy of our first natural parent, and life is full of blessings and of sorrows which come from those who have preceded us. The fate of Achan's family was as much a prophecy of a coming adjustment of deserts and awards, as the fall of the tower of Siloam[2] or the Tay Bridge disaster:[3] it left accounts to be settled in a vast hereafter: it was a door of hope.

Nay, is it not at least possible that, to Achan himself, the valley of Achor may have been a door of hope? Here we dare not dogmatise: but his confession, at the instance of Joshua, is not without traces of a true repentance. He was not, as Judas, hurrying by his own act into the Presence of the Judge: God may well have spoken to his soul in those last moments of agony and shame: and he may have used the last efforts of will which were at his disposal to accept his punishment as coming from God. And if this was the case, Achan's lot was in reality far happier than that of others who have sinned as he did, but who have escaped punishment in this life. "Some men's sins," says the Apostle, "are open beforehand, going before to

[1] Ezek. xviii. 2, 4, 27. [2] St. Luke xiii. 4. [3] December 28, 1879.

judgment; and some men they follow after."[1] Surely of these the last are in the worse case; when everything which conscience threatens, and which justice renders inevitable, is reserved for the future. Achan was punished here: and his trouble may have been to him a door of hope.

The general truth, which is independent of the cases of Israel and of Achan, that even the punishments which God sends may open the way to life's choicest blessings, or to blessings which lie far away beyond it, is too plainly written in Scripture to be mistaken. It was true for the Israel of Joshua's day; it was true for the Israel to which Hosea addressed those warnings, so full of sternness and of love; it is true for each one of us now—true for individuals, and for great bodies of men, for churches, for parties, for nations. We cannot use our Psalter with any approach to intelligence or sincerity without confessing it. "Before I was troubled I went wrong; but now have I kept Thy word."[2] "It is good for me that I have been in trouble, that I might learn Thy statutes."[3] "I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right, and that Thou, of very faithfulness, hast caused me to be troubled."[4] "Blessed is the man whom Thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him in Thy law."[5] "Heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."[6] "Great are the troubles of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of all."[7]

And surely at this season of the year the truth receives its highest consecration at the Sepulchre of our Lord. He indeed was in Himself "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners;"[8] but in His love and condescension He took on Him the whole weight of human sin; He became the Representative Penitent in Gethsemane; "He was made sin for us, Who knew no sin, that we might be made

[1] 1 Tim. v. 24. [2] Ps. cxix. 67. [3] *Ib.* 71. [4] *Ib.* 75.
[5] Ps. xciv. 12. [6] *Ib.* xxx. 5. [7] *Ib.* xxxiv. 19. [8] Heb. vii. 26.

the righteousness of God in Him."[1] To Him also the valley of trouble was a door of hope: the Passion was the herald of the Resurrection. "Being in the Form of God, He emptied Himself of His glory, and took on Him the form of a slave, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death—and that death the Cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and hath given Him a Name that is above every name: that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."[2] And it was "for the joy set before Him that He endured the Cross, despising the shame, and is set down on the Right Hand of the Majesty on high."[3] What is of most importance is that when trouble comes it should be recognised as coming from God; and accepted as His Will, as due to our sins, and as therefore the best thing that could happen. Many reverses in life are relatively worse than Israel's defeat before Ai; many men die in their beds more painfully than did Achan in the valley of Achor. Nothing sweetens family anxieties, or failures in business, or mental anguish, or the loss of friends, or the inroads of illness, or the felt approach of death, so effectively as this conviction that the trial is from God, and that there is hope beyond it. Of this hope Easter is the warrant and the consecration: and the more simply and truly we hold communion with our Risen Lord, the better shall we be persuaded of the reality of that hope within the veil, sure and steadfast,[4] which makes all trouble here not merely tolerable, but, to God's true servants, welcome.

[1] 2 Cor. v. 21. [2] Phil. ii. 6-11. [3] Heb. xii. 2. [4] Heb. vi. 19.

SERMON VI.

THE BLESSING ON JAEL.

JUDGES V. 24.

Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be; blessed shall she be above women in the tent.

THE Old Testament lessons, both in the morning and evening service of to-day,[1] are concerned with the defeat of the army of Jabin, the Pagan king who oppressed Northern Palestine in the days of the Judges, and especially with the death of his general, Sisera. A predecessor and namesake of King Jabin had been conquered by Joshua. Joshua had taken and had burnt Hazor, his capital; but during the years that had since passed, Hazor had risen from its ashes, and its present ruler had established a well-compacted tyranny over the north of Palestine, so that "he mightily oppressed the children of Israel."[2] For twenty years the religion of the true God was proscribed: "they chose new gods."[3] For twenty years, as Deborah sings with pathetic significance, "the inhabitants of the villages ceased; they ceased in Israel."[4] Either they were exterminated, or they were driven to take refuge, as best they could, in mountain-fastnesses or in the caverns which abound in the valleys of Palestine; and it seemed that this part of the work of Joshua was wellnigh undone. The deliverance of Israel from this

[1] The Second Sunday after Trinity.
[2] Judges iv. 3.
[3] Judges v. 8.
[4] *Ib.* 6, 7.

oppressor was achieved by Deborah. She roused Barak, the most prominent soldier in the north, to resistance; Sisera was defeated in the plain of Esdraelon; he fled towards his master's capital, and, taking refuge in the tent of Jael, was put to death by her while asleep. This event, regarded in various aspects and consequences, forms the subject of the Song of Deborah, which has just been read to you.

The history brings four figures before us: two men and two women.

Of the men little need be said. Sisera, the commander of the Canaanite army, with its nine hundred chariots of iron, appears first as Jabin's tool in oppressing Israel, and next as Jael's victim, after his defeat. And Barak, captain of the host of Israel, and a man withal of faith and courage, yet plays only a secondary part in the drama. Barak knew full well all that was involved in Jabin's tyranny. From his mountain home at Kedesh-Naphtali, he could see, away towards the valley of the Upper Jordan, Hazor, Jabin's fortress—the token and cause of Israel's misery: a ride of two or three hours would bring him under its walls. Yet his was not the mind which roused and shaped resistance to the enemy; and even the effort which he ultimately made was not, as was said, for his honour, since the Lord sold Sisera into the the hand of a woman.[1]

The main interest of this narrative lies with the women. Deborah is one of the most striking figures in Jewish history. Under the impulse and protection of a great inspiration from heaven, she was the leader and guide of her countrymen in the effort which restored to them peace and freedom, civil and religious. Her inspiration, the secret of her force, was also the shield of her modesty: she did not forfeit or risk a woman's best grace by uninvited prominence and self-assertion. After the fashion

[1] Judges iv. 9.

of those primitive times, she dwelt under a palm-tree between Ramah and Bethel,—on the highway which then, as now, connects Southern and Northern Palestine: and thither, woman though she was, the children of Israel came up to her, as best they could in those dark days, for judgment. Hers was the voice which roused Barak to encamp with his ten thousand men of Zebulun and Naphtali on Mount Tabor: hers was the presence which, both at Kedesh and on Tabor, sustained his faint spirit and feeble resolution; it was she who bade him, at the critical moment, sweep down from his mountain camp on the Canaanites in the Kishon valley, and that with a word which was of itself a pledge of victory. And when the victory is won, and the host of Jabin has fled in terror and confusion, Deborah is the inspired poet who pours out the song of thankfulness, even though herein she is joined by Barak: Deborah is the judge who awards praise or blame to those who had, in that eventful hour, been false or true to the cause of God and of Israel. Each tribe is passed in review: the easternmost and the westernmost, who had alike been wanting: the sailors of Dan and Asher, who had tarried in their fishing craft, or in the creeks along their coast; the chiefs of Reuben, whose prolonged debates on the banks of their mountain torrents only ended in their remaining among the sheep-troughs to listen to some shepherd's melody, in that hour of danger; and then, in contrast with these, the central and northern tribes, Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin, Zebulun, Naphtali; the governors of Manasseh, the princes of Issachar, the scribes of Zebulun; but especially, and before others, the men of Zebulun and Naphtali—as lying nearest to Jabin's lair, and the chief sufferers from his tyranny, and withal "a people that hazarded their lives unto the death in the high places of the field."[1]

[1] Judges v. 18.

And at the close of her song Deborah utters one emphatic and terrible curse, and one emphatic and extraordinary blessing. The curse is upon Meroz, a small and now forgotten town, some twelve miles from Samaria, which had some signal opportunity of rendering the service which it failed to render; and the blessing is that of the text—on Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite: "Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be; blessed shall she be above women in the tent."

I.

Deborah herself, as we have seen, is a person of commanding interest: but it is Deborah who would have us look away from herself to Jael. Jael's husband, Heber the Kenite, was chief of a band of Bedouins, as we should now call them, who had parted from their fellows in the Southern Desert, and had pitched their tents in the upland valley of Zaanaim, near Barak's home, at Kedesh-Naphtali.

This movement was probably due to their wish to associate themselves, so far as they might, with Israel, as the people which had fuller knowledge of Him Whose Name they had learnt from their own ancestor Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses. No doubt this tie of blood, such as it was, would have recommended them to the Israelite garrison of the neighbouring stronghold of Kedesh-Naphtali; and, on the other hand, Jabin had enough on his hands to wish to be on good terms with an Arab tribe in his neighbourhood which could easily have given him trouble: so, in this sense, there was peace between Heber the Kenite and Jabin, king of Canaan.

To most of us there comes once in life some occasion on which much or all afterwards turns. It comes without warning; it is upon us before we know it; and the hours,

or even the minutes, which pass shape all that follow them.

After the defeat of the Canaanites on the Kishon, and while the remains of his broken army were being swept away by the swollen waters of the Kishon, or chased by the victorious Barak from the scene of their disaster, Sisera fled across the plain, up the highlands of Zebulun and Naphtali towards the fortress and home of his master Jabin. In the confusion and the agony of the moment he must have missed his way; as in the plain of Zaanaim he was somewhat too far north to be on the direct road between the battle-field and Hazor. But then he descried the tents of Heber: the tent of Jael. Jael, after the Eastern fashion, lived in a tent of her own—the tent of the women of Heber's household. "And Jael," says the historian, "went out to meet Sisera, and said unto him, Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not. And when he had turned in unto her into the tent, she covered him with a mantle. And he said unto her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water to drink; for I am thirsty. And she opened a bottle of milk, and gave him drink, and covered him. Again he said unto her, Stand in the door of the tent; and it shall be, when any man doth come and inquire of thee, and say, Is there any man here? that thou shalt say, No."[1]

No doubt as Sisera closed his wearied eyes in sleep, he thought that all was well with him. That which actually happened is best told in the words of Deborah.

"Blessed above women," she sings, "shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be; blessed shall she be above women in the tent. He asked water, and she gave him milk; she brought forth butter in a lordly dish. She put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workmen's hammer, and with the hammer she smote Sisera:

[1] Judges iv. 18-20.

she smote off his head, when she had pierced and stricken through his temples. At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down; at her feet he bowed, he fell; where he bowed, there he fell down dead." [1]

Jael's action on the one hand, and Deborah's inspired judgment on the other, raise questions to which no reflecting minds can be insensible. What was Jael's act? A miserable, weary, defeated fugitive, as it seems, has asked and has received protection at her hands. He is her guest; he has partaken of her hospitality. He is in the sanctuary of her tent; he trusts her implicitly; he is defenceless and asleep; and she violates her hospitality; she breaks her faith; she murders him, as he slumbers, trustful and unprotected, at her very feet. And what is Deborah's judgment? "Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be; blessed shall she be above women in the tent."

II.

Ever since the rise of the Deistic School in the last century, that sentence—not by any means unnoticed before—has been a stock argument with the assailants of the Bible; and sometimes it occasions real embarrassment to Christians who are very far from wishing to be other than sincere believers. Let us then endeavour to consider what Deborah's sentence really involves, and how we may best try to think of the action and character of Jael.

And, here, let us observe that the difficulty, whatever it be, is not to be surmounted by saying that Deborah's utterance about Jael is not to be considered inspired; that it is only a patch of dark human passion occurring in a generally inspired poem; that Deborah, otherwise so

[1] Judges v. 24-27.

judicial and so self-controlled, is for the moment too eager to be able to scrutinise carefully the true moral colour of an act which had resulted in consequences so advantageous to herself and to her people. This account of the matter, I say, is inadmissible. For if Deborah is wrong when she pronounces Jael blessed, how do we know that she is right when she deplores the selfish indifference of Dan and Asher, and the feeble vacillations of Reuben; when she blesses Naphtali and Zebulun; when she curses Meroz? Upon what principle are we to draw the exact line of demarcation, and say: In this verse you see a dark patch of human passion; and in this and this a clear ray from the Throne of the Eternal Justice? If it should be said that we each of us possess a faculty which enables us thus to discriminate between what is right and what is wrong in the teaching of Scripture, then two things would appear to follow. First, it would follow that such a lofty judicial attitude towards the moral teaching of Scripture means that we are above Scripture, and not below it; not learners, but critics; not in need of its teaching, but able to set it to rights. And, secondly, it would follow that Scripture does not differ in kind from any other book. All other books, most assuredly, contain some good and some bad, some false and some true, material. And if the Bible may also be said to be a book of this description, are we not deceiving ourselves and others in going on calling it the Bible, as if, in the kingdom of books, it was somehow unique and supreme?

No. If, as Christians, we believe the Bible to be the Word of God, and the Book of Judges to be a part of the Bible, we cannot say that Deborah, when she blesses Jael, is without inspiration, and that, morally speaking, she is misleading us. Undoubtedly the Bible describes many acts and characters as to which it leaves us at liberty to form our own judgments. But when, as in this case, it

takes us by the hand and bids us think in a given way of a certain character, the case is different. If Deborah's blessing on Jael is uninspired, it is hard to claim inspiration for any part of her song: and if Deborah's song is not inspired, it would be difficult to say what portions of the Book of Judges are: and thus we are brought back to the question, In what sense are we to understand Deborah's language? and how are we to reconcile it with what would seem, at first sight, to be the true character of Jael's action?

(1) Now, in weighing Deborah's language, we have to consider first of all that Sisera's life was, in Deborah's judgment, rightly forfeited. People sometimes write of him as they might of the defeated general of a European army, entitled to the sympathy and consideration which are due to a brave man experiencing great reverse of fortune. Deborah speaks of him as "the Lord's enemy."[1] In Deborah's eyes Sisera represented, first, an impure system of idolatry which had been sentenced to extermination by a Divine command, and next, a long career of plunder and murder, which had brought untold miseries upon the poor peasants of Naphtali and Zebulun. And what Deborah knew, Jael knew too: neither had any doubt that Sisera's life was justly forfeited: a question could only arise as to Jael's method of taking it.

(2) And here let us make a second observation, that Deborah's language about Jael is relative, and that in two respects. It is relative to the conduct of others, and it is relative to her own circumstances as a stranger to the commonwealth of Israel.

(*a*) When Deborah pronounces Jael blessed, she is thinking of others. Jael was blessed among women, which is more precisely defined as "women in the tent," women who led such a life as that of wandering Arabs, beyond the

[1] Judges v. 31.

confines of Israel. Among these Jael's loyalty to such truth as she knew makes her pre-eminently blessed. And Deborah is thinking of Israelites who knew God as Jael did not know Him; who had in their hands and on their consciences the treasure of a revelation from Him, yet who had failed to take part in a great effort for His honour at a crisis of their history. She is thinking—we know from her words—of the sailors of Asher and Dan, and the herdsmen of Reuben, and the townsmen of Meroz, and with these recreant children of the Patriarchs and inheritors of the Revelation she contrasts the poor heathen woman of the desert, outside the Covenant, making the very most, though after a rude and barbarous fashion, of what truth she knew. The deepest point of the contrast is not the act, and the absence of action; but the motive, and the absence of motive,—the will to do what is right, and the absence of will. Deborah projects Jael's fervid loyalty into luminous prominence, where it stands out in telling rebuke to the indifference, or worse, of those who had far greater advantages than Jael. It is a relative judgment; as was His Who contrasted the case of the Pagan Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment with the case of the favoured towns of Galilee, Chorazin, and Bethsaida, which had rejected His teaching.[1] He did not, by that judgment, condone the cruelty and impurity of Phœnician life; but He marked the relative superiority of an ignorance which makes the most of its opportunities to a knowledge which neglects them.

(*b*) And Deborah's judgment of Jael is relative to the time and circumstances in which Jael lived, and to the opportunities at her command, or rather to the absence of them.

If we could take the contents of our minds to pieces, and assign them to their several sources, we should find,

[1] St. Matt. xi. 21.

every one of us, that there are in our minds, broadly speaking, two main kinds of mental possessions,—those which we have conquered for ourselves, and made our own by examination and reflection, and those which we have taken in, as the phrase runs, with our mother's milk, which we have adopted as a mere matter of course, as part and parcel of the mental atmosphere which we breathe, and which we have consistently acted upon, and do act upon, without subjecting them to any scrutiny or re-examination. Thus it is that from time to time very thoughtful writers express opinions which startle us by their unlikeness to the higher tenor of their minds: they are, in truth, for the moment falling back upon some fragments of traditional prejudice which they have never examined or endeavoured to place in a true and working relation with the general system of their opinions. Thus it is that men of action at times adopt a course which is quite unlike that to which the general drift of their lives would point; the truth being that they are for the moment under the sway of some early habit or instinct, the quaint survival of an earlier moral condition which they have never had the leisure, or the courage, or the heart, or the disposition to review.

Now, Jael was in this condition: she had made the most of the little measure of religious truth which had been handed down in her tribe since the days of Jethro,—the truth that there is One True God, Who had made Himself known in a certain measure to Israel. On the other hand, she was by birth and associations, in feeling, and instinct, and practice, a true child of the desert. Of the moral law as revealed to Israel she would have known little or nothing. Certain instincts of right and wrong no doubt she had; but they were shaped, cramped, dominated, perverted, by the traditions of her race and tribe. Her ideas of murder and treachery were not ours; they

were not even those of average civilised communities in the heathen world: they were in keeping with the fierce, wild, wandering life of a savage tribe, living by force and upon sufferance on the outer confines of an early civilisation. She had not parted with these ideas, because she had caught a glimpse of one high and elevating truth. She beheld in Sisera the enemy of that truth: she saw in him the cruel oppressor and murderer of the race to which she was allied by kinship, and, in a measure, by faith. The moral code which she had learned would have taught her that, like any wild beast, Sisera might be legitimately trapped and killed: and she did trap and kill him accordingly.

If we judge her act by the moral standards which are generally accepted among us,—if we judge it by that absolute Moral Code of which our accepted standards fall so far short,—Jael's act is of course sufficiently indefensible. But then its absolute character and complexion is one thing: its relative character,—relative to the time and circumstances in which she lived,—is another. Jael's loyalty to Israel and to the one ray of truth she knew is admirable: the method she chose for expressing her loyalty—though for her a matter of course and custom—is deplorable. Yet she was of her age and people; she did not anticipate a better day; but that was no reason for denying her the praise to which she was otherwise entitled.

Surely moral truth, you say, is always the same: it does not vary with opinion: lying, treachery, murder, are always despicable. Certainly, my brethren: but then there are stages in the clearness with which moral truth is revealed to individuals, or classes, or nations. Is not this the burden of much of our Lord's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount?

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorce-

ment: but I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery."

"Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: but I say unto you, Swear not at all. . . ."

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also."

"Again, ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you." [1]

Here we see the passage from a lower to a higher moral law: the higher was always agreeable to the Mind of God, but the Jewish nation was not yet ready for it. And the Jewish people was judged not by the higher and true law of conduct revealed by Christ, but by the lower and comparatively imperfect law revealed in the Old Testament. And they who, like Jael, were outside Israel's pale, were judged by the fragments of truth they might haply have chanced to meet with, not by revelations, more or less complete, of the true Mind of the All-Holy God. Thus St. Paul decides in his great preface to the statement of the doctrine of our justification before God in the Epistle to the Romans. "There is no respect of persons," he says, "with God." "For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law; and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law." [2] And, so far as we know, Jael had had no opportunities of learning better. For her the moral law was the public opinion of the fierce sons of the desert among whom

[1] St. Matt. v. 31, 32, 33, 34, 38, 39, 43, 44. [2] Rom. ii. 11, 12.

she lived. She had yet to learn—is it certain that no nations, no men of our time have also yet to learn?—the falsehood of the maxim, that "anything is fair in dealing with an enemy." She knew so little of a higher code that she did not forfeit the blessing which attached to her motive, even by the act which followed it.

III.

Let us note three points in conclusion.

1. The equitableness of Deborah's estimate of Jael. Surely there is that in it which we might well copy. How often do we in our judgments of others measure their failures by some standard of which they have never heard, and refuse them credit for excellencies which in them are consummate! They know nothing of truths which have been familiar to us from childhood; they have never suspected rules of conduct which we know to be indefensible and bad. Their standard is a very poor and low one, it may be; but if they have had no chance of learning something better, it is the standard by which they will be judged. We do not risk loyalty to a higher truth than any of which they know, if in judging them we are strong enough to be equitable.

We do not deny that there is an absolute and unchanging rule of conduct, because we make allowances which justice no less than charity demands for uninstructed or half-instructed consciences. We need not deny the magnificent enthusiasm of the Crusaders, because some of their proceedings are indefensible: we should recognise fully the devoted love for our Lord and Saviour which is to be found in many modern Christians, who do not know enough to avoid much that we must deem irreverence and error. Even where a higher motive or enthusiasm is wanting, as when crimes of violence are committed by

the very ignorant, there may, in the eyes of the Eternal Justice, be less to condemn than in the light sins of thought and speech, as we may deem them, of which, with higher and wider knowledge, instructed Christians are constantly guilty.

2. Note also that this history would be sorely misapplied if we were to gather from it that a good motive justifies an action which is known to be bad. There have been appeals to this and other places in Scripture, which proceed, practically if not consciously, on this assumption. The typical assassin of the sixteenth or seventeenth century, whose passionate fanaticism beheld in some reigning monarch the foe of his faith or of his country, appealed to Deborah's judgment of Jael as a sanction of his meditated crime. But the difference is vital. Jael is only eulogised because she lived in an age and in circumstances which extenuated what was imperfect or wrong in her act. She could not have been pronounced blessed had she been a Jewess, much less had she been a Christian. And a Christian cannot, if he would, place himself in her position, or divest himself of that higher knowledge of the Will of God which has been given him. The blessings which the ignorant may inherit are forfeited, when those who know, or might know more, act as do the ignorant. "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin." [1]

3. And, lastly, let us note the presence of unsuspected imperfections in all human endeavour—even when God graciously accepts it. As life draws towards its close, this becomes, or should become, increasingly clear to us. When an act is good in itself, it is constantly sullied by motives that will not bear inspection. When a motive is pure and single, it often issues in action which is obviously imperfect, or worse. As we survey our lives more from

[1] St. John xv. 22.

within, and less from without, with a growing desire to be honest with ourselves and with God, we get nearer and nearer to adopting with perfect sincerity the almost despairing phrase of the prophet, that "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags."[1] Yet even thus we are at the threshold of safety. If we are not sufficient of ourselves to do anything as of ourselves, our sufficiency is of God.[2] If, as we look within and around us, we see everywhere marks of imperfection, or indeed, dark stains of guilt, we know that One in Whom is no sin has been manifested, that He might take away our sins;[3] that what is faulty or worse is hidden and disappears when it is washed in His Blood and covered by His Robe of Righteousness; that though we be without the plea of Jael's deep ignorance, or the fervour of her noble zeal, we may trust, all weak and unworthy as we are, to be at the last accepted, because accepted in the Beloved.[4]

[1] Isa. lxiv. 6.
[2] 2 Cor. iii. 5.
[3] 1 St. John iii. 5.
[4] Eph. i. 6.

SERMON VII.

SAMSON AND DELILAH.

JUDGES xvi. 17.

Then he told her all his heart, and said unto her, There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I have been a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb: if I be shaven, my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man.

IN most lives there is a crisis, if we could only find it out—a turning-point in the path of decisive importance. A day, an hour comes, when we commit ourselves deliberately to some act or some word which governs everything that follows; some act or word upon which we shall look back with feelings of thankfulness or of shame, as upon the most serious moment of our years of trial, throughout the long ages of Eternity. It is often difficult, while we are still here, to distinguish the real importance of one word or act from that of another. Everything is too close to us to be measured accurately, or to be assigned its true proportions: and the saying that history cannot well be made and written by the same man and at the same time, applies to spiritual matters and to the single soul. But in the calm of that world beyond the grave we shall see the significance of certain moments in our years of earthly trial—of days when, like Cæsar, we too passed a Rubicon which sharply severed one phase of our existence from another—the service of God from rebellion against God, or rebellion against God from His

service, as the case may be. We may be very sure that St. Paul thinks often and thankfully of that scene on the road to Damascus, which gave to his whole life a totally new direction, until he offered it, in martyrdom, to the Redeemer Whom he persecuted. Nor can we doubt that Samson—who during the past week has been so much before us in the daily Lessons—still and often remembers those words to Delilah which are before us in the text, when he told her all his heart, and withal surrendered himself into the power of his enemies, and the enemies of Israel and of God.

Samson is unlike any other character in Holy Scripture. Although the sphere in which he moved was a comparatively narrow one, he seems to have made, as indeed was natural, a profound impression on the men of his time. He appears in Scripture as the thirteenth of the fifteen Judges of Israel; he exercised his office for twenty out of the forty years in which the Philistines were rulers at least of his part of the country; and he exercised it during the latter half of this period, since, as we know, they had begun to rule when he was born. Samson then must have been living when, to the horror and shame of all good Israelites, the sacred Ark itself was captured by the Philistines, in the high-priesthood of Eli. For some short time, at any rate, Samson and Samuel must have been judging Israel together: but Samson's scene of work was much less prominent than that of Samuel. The whole active life of Samson was spent in the district which bordered on the old Philistine frontier: he lived among the men of his own little tribe of Dan, and his history seems to have been compiled from its annals; even the neighbouring and powerful tribe of Judah is only once mentioned as in any way affecting him. But the real greatness of no man's life is determined by that of the scene in which he moves: we are what we are in our-

selves, and not simply what that which is really outside us seems to make us. Within that narrow district Samson was the champion of God's cause and honour, and of the freedom and wellbeing of God's people against their heathen oppressors; and this high purpose and work shed over his life the radiance of a true nobility, so that in the only place of the New Testament where he is mentioned at all, he is classed with Gideon, Barak, and Jephthah, as one of those who "through faith waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens."[1]

When Samson entered on his public life in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol, it looked as if the Philistine rule was firmly established. The Israelites were depressed and cowed. The Philistines did not conceal the insolent temper which a position of presumed security so often inspires. Samson does not seem to have attempted to organise any general effort to throw off the Philistine yoke: his course was in this very unlike that of Gideon, or Jephthah, or Barak. He acted alone, as if he could calculate on no help from others, or would have been even embarrassed by it. His work consisted in a series of dashing exploits, calculated to raise the hopes and spirits of his downtrodden countrymen, and to strike the Philistines with apprehension, or even terror; and thus he prepared the way for a more systematic revolt, which was to be carried by those who came after to a successful issue.

It was inevitable that the Philistines should regard him as a public enemy, whom it was desirable to crush either by force or by fraud. When force failed, they betook themselves to fraud. And Samson's life, though given as a whole to a great and holy cause, was marked by great inconsistency and weakness; and his enemies were not slow to discover their advantage. They placed them-

[1] Heb. xi. 32.

selves in communication with Delilah, the last of three Philistine women who were, in succession, objects of Samson's affection; and Delilah engaged to do their work. She was to discover the secret of Samson's strength, which had enabled him so long and so entirely to keep his Philistine adversaries at bay, and after three unsuccessful efforts, she succeeded. "Then he told her all his heart, and said unto her, There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I have been a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb: if I be shaven, my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man."

This was Samson's passage of the Rubicon, which separated his life of triumphant vigour from his life of humiliation and weakness. Until he spoke these words he was master of his destiny; neither green withs, nor new ropes, nor the closed gates of a fortress, nor hosts of armed men, could take from him his freedom and his strength. Whatever else he might be or do, he had and cherished one great and inviolate secret, one transcendent gift, which raised him high above all his fellows, and enabled him to keep his enemies in check. But after his words to Delilah, all had changed. Henceforth nothing awaited him but humiliation and disaster; the bitter moment of discovery that all was lost; the capture; the torture of loss of sight inflicted by the enraged Philistines; the grinding in the prison-house; the death beneath the ruins of the temple of Dagon. It was the turning-point in Samson's career when he told his secret to Delilah.

I.

That which strikes us first of all in this account of Samson's ruin is the possible importance of apparent trifles to the highest wellbeing of human life and char-

acter. I say the possible importance: for it does not follow that trifles, as such, are important, nor are important trifles really trifles when their importance is even suspected.

But here, it has been contemptuously said, we have a case of a man whose whole destiny is made to depend upon his way of wearing his hair. Can anything be conceived more capricious, more unworthy of a great scheme of moral government, more puerile? What is there here of traceable correspondence and proportion between cause and effect? What is this but the grotesque arbitrariness which might be the rule of an Oriental court? how can it be explained on the principles which may reasonably be supposed to determine the great issues of character and life?

Now let it at once be admitted that there is great reason for jealous unwillingness to connect a mere material or physical peculiarity with the solemn issues of moral probation and destiny. But the question is whether the length of Samson's hair can be treated as merely a thing of physical interest. Remember that Samson comes before us in the Book of Judges in a threefold character. He is a judge of Israel—that is his official description. He is a hero, endowed by the Spirit of the Lord with supernatural strength—that is his personal distinction. But he is also a Nazarite; he is a consecrated man; he observes a rule to which he is bound by a religious vow for life. There were Nazarites of days, as they were called, in ancient Israel; persons who undertook to perform the penitential discipline of abstaining from wine, and letting their hair grow for so many days, or weeks, or years. Such, it would seem, were the four brethren at Jerusalem with whom St. Paul took part during the last seven days of their consecration, in order to remove mistakes as to his real bearing at the time towards the Jewish law.[1] But

[1] Acts xxi. 17-26.

the more solemn Nazarite vow was for life: and besides Samson himself, his great contemporary Samuel, and, in a later age, St. John the Baptist, were in this sense Nazarites. These men were all bound by vow for life to leave their hair uncut, to abstain from wine, and from any contact with a corpse; and so high was the religious standing of a Nazarite in Israel, that, as appears from a careful comparison of the law of the Nazarite in Numb. vi. with that of the consecration of the High Priest in Levit. xxi., the Nazarite, of whatever tribe, was looked upon as a consecrated man, almost as a priest—a consideration which may explain both the priestly duties discharged by Samuel, and also the special privileges accorded to Nazarites in later ages.

The Nazarite vow had of course a deep religious meaning: it meant that the person who adopted it sacrificed himself to the Lord. The Nazarite shunned all defilement from contact with the dead—even when those dead were the nearest relatives—in order to represent and remind himself of the purity which should be the law of his life. He drank no wine nor strong drink, partly to express his separation from general society, and partly as a public symbol of religious asceticism: and he allowed his hair to grow, as a crown which, as a Jewish doctor puts it, became a man who had conquered his passions, and so differed from other men, who are, as a rule, their slaves.

Samson, it is easy to see, must have been, in practice, an indifferent Nazarite at certain periods of his career: his marriage-feast in Timnath was at issue with the spirit, at any rate, of one part of the Nazarite vow, as his relations with the Philistine woman in Gaza, and, later on, with Delilah in Sorek, were with the other. This inconsistency did not, of itself, involve disloyalty to the ruling idea of his life as a champion of Israel against the heathen. It would have been better far had he been consistent: but

he was, in the early part of his life, like many men who have lived, on the whole, for a noble end, but the perfectness of whose life has been sadly marred by features which belied it. Such a man was, in after days, King Solomon, the greatest of Israel's monarchs, the master of inspired and uninspired wisdom, the wonder and envy of the East, who yet was so little capable of keeping his inclinations in order that he closed his days amid presages of a ruin that would overwhelm his work. Such a man was Constantine the Great, the Roman emperor to whom the Church of Christ owes so great a debt of gratitude, and whose interest in Christianity was, in its way, undoubtedly sincere, while yet his family life was disfigured by crimes over which Christian history would too gladly draw the veil. Such was Lord Bacon, to whom modern science owes the method which has secured its greatest triumphs, and whose general desire to be of service to his generation is indisputable, while yet everything was wrecked by faults which justify the poet's sentence—

"The wisest, brightest, meanest of mankind."[1]

Samson's inconsistencies did not ruin his work so long as he was faithful to its central idea: and so long as his hair was uncut he felt that his life was a consecrated life, and that he must keep its high purpose in view. Those seven locks of hair, as they floated in the breeze, taught other Israelites what to expect of him, and they rebuked in his own conscience all in his life that was not in keeping with the Nazarite law. And accordingly the preternatural gift of great physical strength was attached to this one particular of the Nazarite observance,—which did duty as a symbol for all the rest,—and upon the careful maintenance of which, fidelity to the general principle of a consecrated life would appear to have depended.

[1] Pope's *Essay on Man*, Ep. iv. 282.

Yes! it seemed to be a trifle whether a man's hair was to be permitted to grow, or was cut off. In itself it was a trifle—infinitely unimportant. But it was not a trifle, in the light of its associations; Samson knew that it was no trifle: he had no mind to betray to Delilah what he knew to be the secret of his strength. Behind the commonest acts in life, it often happens, there cluster infinite issues; a whole moral world may be at stake: heaven or hell may await us behind a deed done, a word spoken, a consent or a refusal,—and these petty acts at once become momentous; their importance is measured by their results. What could matter less in itself than whether a man was or was not circumcised? "Neither circumcision availeth anything," said the Apostle, "nor uncircumcision."[1] But let circumstances change: let it be maintained by a powerful school in Galatia that no Christian can do without circumcision, and the meaning of the act changes too. "Behold, I Paul say unto you, that, if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing."[2]

What could matter less in itself than the act of scattering a little incense before a magistrate, on a few live coals? But let that magistrate represent the Pagan State, and the offered incense be an act of devotion to the genius of the Emperor, and this act in a Christian means nothing less than apostasy from Christ. At this hour a little water in a font, a little bread and wine on a table, seem insignificant enough in themselves. But suppose that they are "outward visible signs of an inward spiritual grace given unto us, ordained by Christ Himself, as a means whereby we receive the same,"[3] and they cease to be insignificant: we see behind, beneath them, the vital powers of the New Creation; they are points of contact with Him Who makes all things new.[4]

And every life has its secret—the secret of its hidden

[1] Gal. v. 6. [2] *Ib.* 2. [3] Church Catechism. [4] Rev. xxi. 5.

strength; and very often this secret makes all depend upon something, some observance, some attachment, some form of words, some habit dating from childhood, that may seem trifling enough to others. We cannot help it. And every life has also its own secret history, and has run in a channel which would suit no other, and finds its points of contact with the invisible in that which suggests nothing to those who have not the key to its meaning.

II.

Samson's history suggests, secondly, the incalculably great influence which belongs to women in controlling the characters and destinies of men.

There is an idea abroad in our day that women play a part in human life which is less than that which an Absolute Justice would assign them; that they are excluded from positions and from an influence which ought to be theirs; and that one of the reforms which thoughtful people are to aim at is to secure for women a new sphere both in social and political life. The old lines of the Christian civilisation which have come down to us are condemned as belonging to a past phase in the world's history; the Apostle's expression, the "subjection"[1] of women, is selected for especial reprobation; and the daughters of the rising generation are encouraged to enter life with new views and purposes, undreamt of by their predecessors; whether as members of some of the learned professions, or as candidates for the suffrage, or it may be, ere long, for Parliamentary honours or for seats in the Cabinet; in any case, as the rivals rather than as the helpmates of men. And thus they are, with entire consistency, advised further to frequent our Universities, that by pursuing the same studies as young men, and in their

[1] 1 St. Pet. iii. 1.

company, they may be qualified for the new part which awaits them in the civilisation of the future.

There is a great deal to be said on this subject from the point of view of Christian teaching: but I shall confine myself to a single remark. If the object which such a change is intended to promote be a larger influence for women in human life, it will surely be disappointed. For the influence which Nature and Christianity alike assign to women, and which is, as I have said, enormous, is an indirect influence. As man's helpmate, woman inevitably governs in a large sphere of our common life. She has not indeed man's strength of muscle, or man's strength of will, or, at least as a rule (for there are great exceptions), man's strength of understanding. But her life of sympathy is much richer and stronger than his; her passive courage, as a rule, is greater; her insight into character more accurate and penetrating. And these qualities cover a very large district of our common existence, so that in all ages, but especially since the Incarnation has rescued women from the degradations of the Ancient World, woman's position in life and society has been one of great power: and this power is so great because it is wielded on a field where man generally does not dispute it, and where there is no competition with the forms of strength which are peculiarly man's own. But the tendency of modern theories is to substitute for this indirect influence of women a direct influence, to be shared or disputed with men: women are to govern, not through the qualities in which they are confessedly superior, but through those in which, as a rule, they are inferior to men. What must be the consequence of these pedantic experiments which ignore not merely the precepts of the Apostles, but the dictates and instincts of nature? Surely when woman leaves her vantage-ground of indirect influence to enter into a competition with man on his own

level, she must in the long-run experience the fate of relative weakness; she must be vanquished. Too probably she would not merely fail of achieving a new position which Nature and Religion alike discourage: she would endanger the precious and commanding influence which is at once her right and the salt of Christian society, but which the jealousy of man has in past ages not seldom endeavoured to destroy, or at least impoverish. "He told her all his heart"—such is Samson, the champion of Israel, at the feet of Delilah. Samson's life may almost be said to have turned upon his successive relations with women. His twelve recorded exploits fall naturally into three groups, and each of these gathers round a Philistine woman. Of the three, Delilah was the most attractive, and the worst. When she became acquainted with Samson, the Philistines had learned to dread his power; and they accordingly offered her a heavy bribe if she would discover and betray to them the secret of his strength. Three times he put her off with answers which proved to be false; but she was not discouraged. She knew that, strong as he was, she had resources at command which the weakness within him would not resist; and so at the last he yielded and told her all his heart.

That Delilah used her influence for a bad end—as a bad woman would—I do not, of course, forget. But as she wields her power with such ruthless decision, she points a moral which we may not pass by. Samson had placed himself in her power; and she was at least loyal to the instincts of race and country. And if Delilah represents the misuse of woman's great influence, side by side with Delilah in this very Book of Judges there is another woman who more than redresses the balance—Deborah, the judge and mother in Israel.[1] If Delilah is the ruin of Samson, Deborah is, humanly speaking, the making of

[1] Judges v. 7.

Barak. She it is who breathes into the despondent commander of the forces of Israel the strength and resolution that was so sorely needed: hers is the impulse which hurls back the hosts of Sisera up the Kishon Valley, and gives freedom and peace to Israel. In her song of triumph[1] there is almost the strength of purpose which belongs to man, coupled with the quick sympathy and fine penetration of a true woman: and she suggests what Samson might have been had Delilah been only as herself. Few questions are graver for a man than the character of the woman to whose influence he voluntarily surrenders himself. Few questions are graver for a woman than the character of the influence which she exerts upon a man.

III.

But nothing is more noteworthy in this history than the illustration which it affords of the difference between physical and moral courage.

Physical courage is a part of man's animal outfit. In its lowest form it is the result of ignorance; it is that confidence in the presence of danger which lasts only so long as does ignorance of the real greatness of the danger —as when a troop of brave savages rushes upon a position defended by modern artillery. In its ordinary form it is more warranted by knowledge; it is that reasonable confidence while in the presence of danger which is created by a consciousness of possessing the strength which is necessary to meet it. Such is the courage of scientific commanders who tell us that battles are really won by mathematics. In its highest form it is a creation of nerve; it is that coolness which enables a man to face danger calmly, when its reality is fully recognised, and in the absence of adequate means for meeting it. This

[1] Judges v.

highest form of physical courage is indeed a very great endowment; it always has been and always will be honoured in those who possess it conspicuously; and if as you leave this church you read the inscriptions at the base of more than one of the statues which line the walls, you will see that our countrymen in bygone years have not been wanting in it.

Samson had physical courage: it was the natural accompaniment of his extraordinary strength. He found the Israelites cowed and depressed before the triumphant Philistines; he could feel only their indignation, he had no part in their fear. Whether he rends the lion as he would rend a kid;[1] or slays thirty Philistines at Ashkelon, in order to pay a debt of honour to the guests who expounded his riddle;[2] or smites the Philistines with a great slaughter after their burning his wife and his father-in-law;[3] or breaks the cords with which the men of Judah bound him in the rock Etam;[4] or slays one thousand Philistines with the jaw-bone of an ass;[5] or carries away the gates of Gaza at midnight to the hill above Hebron,[6]—he shows that he does not know what fear is in the presence of danger. No doubt we are reminded again and again that Samson's was a preternatural endowment; that the Spirit of the Lord moved him in the camp of Dan, and came mightily upon him at three of the most critical periods of his subsequent career.[7] But the source of the gift and its exceptional proportions do not destroy its real character; it was physical courage, warranted by a sense of possessing preterhuman strength. As the history of Samson's exploits was repeated by the Phœnicians on the coast to the Greek traders from the islands of the Ægean, it contributed not a few elements towards forming the Greek

[1] Judges xiv. 6. [2] *Ib.* 19. [3] *Ib.* xv. 6-8.
[4] *Ib.* xv. 11-14. [5] *Ib.* 15. [6] *Ib.* xvi. 1-3.
[7] *Ib.* xiii. 25; xiv. 6, 19; xv. 14.

legend of Hercules; and Hercules is before all things the type of dauntless courage, reposing upon gigantic strength.

Yes! physical courage is a great gift, but there is a higher and a distinct courage, with which it cannot compare—a courage which is not seldom found where physical courage is wholly wanting. Physical courage is, in its highest forms, the courage of the brave or calculating animal; moral courage is the courage of the spirit of man. Moral courage is independent, not merely of physical strength, but of knowledge and nerve as well; it is the courage, not seldom, of the timid and the defenceless. It takes no account of resources, or of consequences; it is prompted not by muscular or nervous power, but by principle. It consists in simple loyalty to what is known to be right and true—a loyalty which acts or refrains from action, which speaks or is silent, as may be necessary. The highest forms of it have been displayed by weak women, and the strongest and bravest men have lacked it altogether.

Soldiers who have no fear of death in action cannot always stand ridicule at mess; statesmen who are daunted by no amount of opposition or insult from declared opponents do not venture always to tell their friends the truth; men in humble life who have saved others from death by drowning or fire at imminent personal risk, yet have been unable to say "No" to a wife or a friend when tempted from the paths of honesty or of virtue.

So it was with Samson. He rent the lion like a kid, and he slew one thousand of the oppressors of his countrymen with the jaw-bone of an ass; but he would have been far greater if he could have resisted the blandishments of Delilah.

What is the secret of moral courage? It is not nerve nor brain; it is a humble but vivid sense of the presence of God. In a Christian soul, loyalty to principle means a

sense of the presence of Christ. If we think that He is out of the way, and that we are alone, face to face with impetuous, or clever, or attractive people who are urging us to do or to consent to something which our conscience condemns, we too naturally give way. But if we are sure that He is looking on, ready to help and bless us, ready, if we will have it so, to condemn us or judge us, we act as He would wish without effort, but as a matter of common-sense. When Peter denied Jesus Christ, he had lost sight of Him: there was the wall of the Court-house between Jesus and Peter; but when afterwards "Jesus looked upon" Peter, the latter went out and wept bitterly.[1] They in whose hearts Christ our Lord, Crucified, Risen, Ascended, is worshipped with faithful and persevering affection, possess the true secret of Christian courage; they not only vanquish the Philistines, but—what is much harder—they resist the seductions of Delilah. After all, the triumphs of physical courage belong to the world of sense: the triumphs of moral courage belong already to the Invisible world, and are everlastingly rewarded in it.

[1] St. Luke xxii. 61, 62.

SERMON VIII.

GOOD, BUT WEAK.

1 SAM. iii. 13.

Because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.

THIS is the reason assigned for the heavy punishment which was to visit the family of Eli, the High Priest of Israel. Eli was descended, as you would remember, from Ithamar, the younger of the sons of Aaron. How the younger line of Ithamar came to be substituted for the elder line of Eleazar, we do not know. Eli would seem to have succeeded Abishua, of the older line of Eleazar: and there must have been some occurrence, involving failure on the part of Eleazar's descendants, and special favour towards the descendants of Ithamar, to account for an arrangement which violated the hereditary law that governed the transmission of the priesthood. As it was, Abishua's descendants lived as private persons in Israel until the days of Zadok, who succeeded to the High-Priesthood when Abiathar, the last High Priest of the line of Ithamar, was deposed by Solomon for his share in the rebellion of Adonijah.[1] Eli then was the first High Priest of the family of Ithamar: and he was not only High Priest, but Judge of Israel as well, thus uniting in his person the functions of a chief ecclesiastical ruler and a temporal sovereign. His position is thus,

[1] 1 Kings ii. 26, 27.

at least in the early days of Israel, unique. Nothing nearly resembling it occurs again before the days of the Maccabees.

Eli passed his life for the most part at Shiloh, the ancient sanctuary situated in one of the most secluded valleys of the tribe of Ephraim. Shiloh, as the name implies, was a place of rest. There Israel rested after his long wanderings in the desert, after his fierce struggle for the possession of Canaan. There the Sacred Ark rested, after the conquest of the country, when it was brought from Gilgal; there it rested from the closing days of Joshua to the early years of Samuel. There, as every devout Israelite believed, the Lord Jehovah rested in an especial mode of presence: as was implied in the prayer, "Hear, Thou That sittest upon the cherubims,"[1] meaning those which overshadowed the Ark. There, as from the seat of judgment, Joshua finally divided Western Palestine among the tribes. There, from father to son, in steady succession, the descendants of Aaron, in the line of Eleazar, had exercised their Priesthood: and there was now installed Eli, of Ithamar's line, with his sons and dependants, living in a scene already rich with great associations and inspiring and illustrious memories. It was at Shiloh that Eli spent his years,—tranquil and busy, and in the main honourable years they were; busy undoubtedly, since he had in his hands the civil as well as the religious interests of his people. With what gracious dignity he ordinarily discharged the duties of his high office we know from the visits which were paid by Hannah to Shiloh, both before and after the birth of Samuel. Well fitted, surely, was Shiloh to be the seat of an ecclesiastical ruler, lying, as it did, well off the main high road which ran through the country from north to south; lying among hills which fairly shut it in on every

[1] Ps. lxxx. 1.

side but one,—their sides terraced with vines or olives, or fig-trees,—while in the plain below, on a slight eminence levelled by the hand of man, stood the Tabernacle, containing the Sacred Ark, and surrounded by the dwellings of the priests and Levites, and others concerned in the civil and religious government of the country. Shiloh was never a capital, as was Jerusalem or Samaria, or even Shechem: during the greater part of the year it was as quiet as any small country cathedral town in England; only when at the yearly festival devout Israelites crowded to their national sanctuary was its seclusion invaded. Well might it have seemed an ideal home of prayer and study, of mild authority and ripe wisdom, where piety and integrity and purity and philanthropy might be trained to high perfection for the common good. Yet Shiloh was the scene of the base avarice, and high-handed violence, and vulgar profligacy of the sons of Eli; and it was also the scene of Eli's weakness—so culpable in itself, so fraught with ruin to his family and his house,—when "his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not."

I.

Eli, let us observe, was otherwise, and personally, a good man. His character underwent searching tests at the most critical periods of his life: it is clear that he was resigned, humble, and, in the truest sense, devout.

(*a*) Eli's resignation to the Will of God was conspicuous on the very trying occasion of the announcement of his punishment for the great failing which will presently be more fully noticed. He was told that his family would be replaced by the rival house; that his sons would die, both of them, on a single day; that those members of his family who were not cut off in their

youth would be in a worse case than those who were, since they would have to beg their bread of their rivals; that none of his descendants would attain to old age; that neither bloody nor unbloody sacrifices, whereby the ordinary sins both of priests and people were purged under the ancient Law, would avail to cancel the iniquity of his family.[1]

If Eli had been the successor of a long line of rulers of the religion of Israel, submission would have been easier than it was. You can fall with dignity, it has been said, when you have behind you a great history. It was easier for Louis XVI. to mount the scaffold than for Napoleon to go to St. Helena. Eli had succeeded to a position to which his family could never have expected to succeed in the ordinary course of things. He hoped, no doubt, that his succession would secure to his family the dignity of the High-Priesthood for all coming time, or at least for many a generation to come; he hoped that he was to be the first of a long line of priests of the house of Ithamar. The disappointment of a hope like this is much more than any but a good man can experience without repining; and Eli, had he been other than a good man, might have argued that the severity of the punishment meted out to him was out of proportion to his personal fault. His fault was after all not positive, but negative; he had only done less than he might have done; he had sinned out of good-nature and a too easy temper, but could he have been chastised more severely had he himself sinned viciously and of malice prepense? This is what many a man would have said in Eli's position; but Eli is too certain that he is in the hands of One Who is All-just as well as All-powerful, to attempt or think of complaint or remonstrance. When an unnamed prophet first announced to him his sentence he

[1] 1 Sam. ii. 30-36; iii. 14.

was silent. When the boy Samuel repeated it, he uttered the words which, next after those in Gethsemane, have given expression to religious resignation for all time: "It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good."[1]

(β) Secondly, Eli's personal goodness is seen in his humility. He submits to be rebuked and sentenced by his inferiors without a word of remonstrance. A nameless member of the prophetic order tells a man who is at the head of the Religion as well as of the State of Israel, that his conduct has been marked by ingratitude to God, and that the doom of degradation awaits his house. We know how rulers like Ahab or Manasseh treated prophets, however eminent, who told them unwelcome truths. Eli listens: he is silent: no violent word, much less any act of violence, escapes him when thus confronted with what a less humble man would have deemed gross impertinence. And the message of the nameless prophet is repeated by the little boy Samuel, whose patron Eli was, and to whose parents he had been kind. Samuel was, as we know, even as a child, favoured by a heavenly vision; but Samuel stood in much the same relation towards Eli that a chorister in this Cathedral does to the Archbishop of Canterbury, or to a dignitary, if such there were, who should combine in his person the offices of Primate of the Church and Prime Minister. Yet when Samuel tells Eli that God "would do a thing in Israel at which both the ears of every one that heareth it should tingle"[2]—meaning the degradation and punishment of his patron's family—Eli is even eager to hear the utmost that the boy has to say. For he is thinking not of the channel through which the message came, but only of its substance, its ground in truth, its moral rather than its official authority. He has no petty sense of offended dignity that must vent its spleen upon

[1] 1 Sam. iii. 18. [2] *Ib.* 11.

the messenger, when his conscience tells him that the message is what he might expect to hear. This is true humility; the desire, the determination, to see ourselves as we really are, and to bear ourselves towards God and towards our fellow-men accordingly.

(γ) Thirdly, Eli's personal piety is especially noticeable at the moment of his death. You remember the scene —one of the most pathetic in the Old Testament. The struggle to throw off the Philistine yoke had not yet ended; the Philistines were making a supreme effort that it should end in the permanent subjection of Israel. They had come up in force out of their own plain on the Mediterranean shore, and were encamped in a strong position in the hills—in the very heart of the country, at Aphek near Mizpeh. They had already inflicted a severe defeat on the Israelites, when the idea occurred to some soldiers in the beaten army, that if the Ark of the Covenant, the Ark of the Sacred Presence, could only be brought from Shiloh to the camp of Israel, Israel's victory over the Philistines would be inevitable. There were obvious objections to such a use of the Ark; but the danger was pressing. Eli feebly consented, and his sons Hophni and Phinehas went forth as guardians of the most precious thing in Israel, to the battle-field at Aphek. The Philistines indeed were at first terrified; they knew the history of the Passage of the Jordan and of the Conquest of Canaan. But in the event they inflicted a crushing defeat on Israel; thirty thousand Israelites, and Hophni and Phinehas, were left dead on the field; and the Ark fell into the hands of the victorious Pagans. Eli, bearing the weight of his ninety-eight years, sat trembling and expectant by the side of the road leading to the watch-tower of Shiloh. Blind as he was, he could not see the messenger who had suddenly appeared running up the narrow defile from Lebonah, and whose presence

at once created in all Shiloh a profound sensation. The messenger however approached, and told the old man that he had fled from the battle-field. Eli asked for more news. Eli was a man who loved the country which he ruled, and he had to hear that Israel had fled before the Philistines, and there had been a great slaughter among the people. He listened in silence. He was a father who loved his children tenderly, if with a mistaken affection: he had to hear that his two sons Hophni and Phinehas were dead. Still he listened in silence. He was a priest, with his heart in the right place; a man to whom the honour of God and the interests of religion meant more than anything else in the world, more than the welfare of his family, or of his country. He had to hear that the Ark of God was taken. It was too much. "It came to pass, when the messenger made mention of the Ark of God, that Eli fell off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died."[1]

This, I say, was an unpremeditated revelation of his character. He might have survived the national disgrace: he might have survived his children's death; but that the Ark of the Sacred Presence, of which he was the appointed guardian, should be taken—this he could not survive. It touched the Divine honour; and Eli's devotion is to be measured by the fact that the shock of such a disaster killed him on the spot.

II.

There is then no question as to Eli's personal excellence; but it was accompanied by a want of moral resolution and enterprise which explains the ruin of his house. He and it were ruined, "because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." The original word might perhaps

[1] 1 Sam. iv. 18.

be better rendered, "they brought curses on themselves." They are described as "sons of Belial," [1] or, in modern language, as thoroughly bad men. The law of Moses gave express instructions as to the share which the priest was to have of every peace-offering,[2] and Hophni and Phinehas insisted upon taking more than the law gave them, and in taking it in a way that defeated the requirements of the law. To this high-handed avarice they added habits of personal debauchery; and thus religion fell into contempt. "Men abhorred the offering of the Lord." [3]

Eli knew what was going on. "I hear," he said to his sons, "of your evil dealings from all this people; ye make the Lord's people to transgress." [4] Eli was not indifferent; he was not silent; he spoke to his sons in words of calculated severity. But he only spoke; he did not act. The scandal went on. When the Ark was sent to the camp, it was accompanied by Hophni and Phinehas. And every Israelite knew that, if Hophni continued to hold his present position, he would at no distant date sit in the seat of Aaron. Eli only talked to his sons; and we can understand how he may have persuaded himself that this was enough: that instead of taking a painful resolution, it was better to leave matters alone. If he were to do more, was there not a risk that he might forfeit the little influence over the young men that still remained to him? Would not harsh treatment defeat its object, by making them desperate? Might they not attribute the most judicial severity to mere personal annoyance? If, after speaking to them, he left them alone, they would think over his words. Anyhow, they would soon be older; and as they grew older they would, he may have hoped, grow more sensible; they would see the imprudence and impropriety as well as the graver aspects of their conduct; they

[1] 1 Sam. ii. 12.
[2] Lev. vii. 31-35.
[3] 1 Sam. ii. 17.
[4] *Ib.* 23, 24.

would anticipate the need for action on their father's part by a reformation of manners which would hush the murmurs and allay the discontent of Israel. And even if this could not be calculated on very securely, something might occur to give a new turn to their occupations; in any case, it might be better to wait and see whether matters would not in some way right themselves.

This is what weak people do; they escape, as they think, from the call of unwelcome duty, from the duty of unwelcome action, by stretching out the eyes of their mind towards some very vague future, charged with all sorts of airy improbabilities. They call it "the chapter of accidents": they trust for relief from their present embarrassments to the chapter of accidents. My brethren, whatever appearances may say, there is no such chapter in the book either of man's natural history, or of his religious history. Every occurrence that we label an accident is in reality an act of the Divine Providence; only it is an act for which we find it less easy to account than are God's ordinary acts. What seems to us the most fortuitous of accidents is the issue of the most deliberate Will that exists, guided by Infinite Wisdom and Infinite Love. And if we are consciously at issue with that Wisdom and that Love, we are playing desperate tricks with ourselves if we dream that anything can happen that will really relieve us. If Eli had not been blinded by his misplaced affection for his sons, he would have known that new outward circumstances do not improve those whose wills are already on a wrong moral tack; and that there is no truth whatever in the assumption that because we are getting older we are therefore somehow necessarily getting better. Years may only bring with them a harder heart and a more blunted conscience. The experience of life may make men cynical even more easily than it may make them wise; and they who in youth have refused to hear Moses

and the prophets are not likely to be persuaded in after life though one rose from the dead.[1] Nothing but an inward change—a change of will and character and purpose—could have saved Hophni and Phinehas. And this change was more probable, to say the least, if they could cease to hold offices, which meant for them only the deepening guilt of ever accumulating profanations. There is a bitter epigram—bitter, but seemingly true—that more evil is done in the world by weak men than by wicked men. Downright wickedness rouses opposition; something, men feel, must be done, if anything can be done, to put it down. But weakness saunters through the world arm in arm with goodness: and men put up with its failures out of consideration to the good company it keeps. Had it not been for the excellence of Eli's personal character, Israel would have risen in indignation to chase the young profaners of the Sacred Priesthood from the precincts of the Sanctuary. But Eli's sons could not be treated as common criminals; and Eli failed to do for his God, for his religion, and for his country, that which he only could do—and which must needs be done if the law of God's just judgments was not to take effect.

Eli's sin consisted in this: he did not "restrain his sons." He ought to have removed them from offices which they dishonoured. He only talked to them. His sin was only a sin of omission: it did not debase his personal character; it did not make him proud, or rebellious, or ungodly. But it involved the misery of his country: the discredit of the religion over which he presided: the dishonour of his God. "Thou honourest thy sons before Me";[2]—that was how the nameless prophet, speaking in the Name of the Lord, described Eli's sin. It was a sort of sin of which only an amiable man could be guilty; but, for all that, it was fatal.

[1] St. Luke xvi. 31. [2] 1 Sam. ii. 29.

III.

Let us make two observations in conclusion.

(*a*) It is said that a refined civilisation brings with its increased softness of manners a corresponding weakening of human character. This, it is urged, is to be seen in public as well as in private life: but especially is it observable in the modern relations between parents and children. Fifty years ago an English father was king in his household: he was approached with distant respect: he was loved, but he was feared as much as he was loved: his will was law, and he did not scruple to enforce it. Now, many a family is virtually a little republic, which assigns to the parents a sort of decorative leadership, but in which the young people, in virtue sometimes of their number, sometimes of their high spirits, really rule. Those who know most of this change can best tell us whether it works well; and especially whether fathers who fail to assert their true authority are rewarded by the great gift of dutiful and high-minded sons. It may be that, two generations back, the relations between parents and children erred on the side of stiffness and severity. Is it certain that in our own day they do not err on that of good-natured indifference to plain moral obligations?

Brethren, be sure of this, that if manners may change, natural relationships and their accompanying obligations are ever the same. No relationship can be more charged with responsibility than that between a parent and the immortal being to whom he has been the means of giving life. Nothing that we can enact by law or change by custom can cancel, or weaken, or modify a father's duty to do his utmost for the moral as well as the material, the eternal even more than the temporal interests of his child. That greatest of responsibilities lives on whether it is recog-

nised or not; and on its neglect or discharge mainly depends the wellbeing of a soul, of thousands of souls, in time and in eternity. It may be that, two generations ago, the relations between fathers and sons were wanting in geniality, that they were stiff and formal. But let us ask ourselves this question: Is it better, when a father has gone to his account, that his son should say of him, "My father kept me in strict order, but he never let me do any wrong that he could prevent;" or, "My father was the most kindly and easy-going of men; but he never helped me to keep out of troubles, which will not, alas! be buried in my grave"?

(β) And, secondly, let us note that no outward circumstances can, of themselves, protect us against the insidious assaults of evil, or against the enfeeblement of a truant will. If Hophni and Phinehas could have led honest and pure lives anywhere, it would have been on the steps of the Sanctuary in Shiloh. If anywhere Eli could have felt that family affections may be so misplaced as to dishonour God, and that weakness in a ruler, or a father, or a priest may be criminal, he would have felt it on a spot which was so charged with the memories of the heroes and saints of Israel. But, in truth, external advantages of this kind only help us when the will and the conscience are in a condition to be helped; and Shiloh, in its tragic desolation, remains at this hour a monument of Eli's weakness and of his children's shame.

When, fourteen centuries ago, that great scholar and antiquarian, St. Jerome, visited Shiloh, he reported that "hardly slight traces of its ruins—hardly the foundations of its sanctuaries remained."[1] And when, ten centuries before St. Jerome, the prophet Jeremiah, standing in the gate of Solomon's temple at Jerusalem, was denouncing the sins which would speedily bring on it the ruin which

[1] St. Jerome, on Zeph. i. 15 (vi. 692, ed. Ben.).

he predicted, what was the burden of his warning in the Name of the Lord?

> "Go now to My place,
> Which was in Shiloh,
> Where I set My Name at the first,
> And see what I did to it,
> For the wickedness of My people Israel."[1]

And what is thus recorded in bygone ages may still be seen at the present day. That once smiling valley is now as uncultivated and bleak as any parts of the Highlands of Scotland. The scanty ruins of a Christian church, a deserted mosque tomb, a fountain once connected with the services of the tabernacle, a level piece of ground which certainly bears traces of the hand of man, and on which, it may be, the tabernacle once stood—these are all that remain to recall its past history. The hillsides, once so fertile and productive, are now but rude ridges of limestone rock, covered here and there with scanty vegetation; the plain once filled with all that marked a centre of national and religious life is unvisited, unless it be now and then by a stray peasant or shepherd, or by the tents of wandering Bedouins. We hear of a prophet, Ahijah, lingering there in the days of Jeroboam;[2] and some heathen Cuthite settlers for a while after the captivity of Israel.[3] But Shiloh substantially remains what it became soon after that dark and eventful day when the news that the Ark was taken reached it, and when Eli died. In the main, it is what it has been for thirty centuries. And Jewish tradition and critical research agree in supposing that in some one of the ancient rock-tombs on its western side, there yet may rest the dust of Eli and his sons, waiting for the last award amid the desolation which their hands had wrought.

For the ruin of Shiloh is inseparably bound up with

[1] Jer. vii. 12. [2] 1 Kings xi. 29. [3] Jer. xli. 5; cf. 2 Kings xvii. 30.

the sin and fall of the house of Eli. The Ark returned, indeed, from its captivity among the Philistines; it returned, but not to Shiloh. In familiar words, which we only understand in the light of the history which we have been considering, a later Psalmist tells how Shiloh's glories passed to a new and greater sanctuary:—

> "The Lord forsook the tabernacle in Silo:
> Even the tent that He had pitched among men.
> He delivered their power into captivity,
> And their beauty into the enemy's hands.
> He gave His people over also unto the sword,
> And was wroth with His inheritance.
> Their priests were slain with the sword,
> And there were no widows to make lamentation.
> . . . . . .
> He refused the tabernacle of Joseph,
> And chose not the tribe of Ephraim;
> But chose the tribe of Judah,
> Even the hill of Sion which He loved.
> And there He built His temple on high,
> And laid the foundation of it like the ground which
> He hath made continually."[1]

No, brethren, no outward things, no holy home, no sacred profession, no guidance of friends in the present, or saintly memories in the past, can guard or invigorate us, if in the sanctuary of will and conscience that Presence is absent, that Voice unheard, Which will alone suffice. Except the Lord build the house of human character, their labour is but lost that build it; except the Lord keep the fortress of the human soul, the watchman waketh but in vain.[2] Yet He Who lived and died that we might live will not fail us, if in will and purpose we are true to Him—true as men who know and own their weakness.

> "Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart:
> Prove me, and examine my thoughts.
> Look well if there be any way of wickedness in me,
> And lead me in the way everlasting."[3]

[1] Ps. lxxviii. 61-70. [2] *Ib.* cxxvii. 1, 2. [3] *Ib.* cxxxix. 23, 24.

SERMON IX.

SAUL AND DAVID.

1 SAMUEL xiii. 13, 14.

And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, which He commanded thee; for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord hath sought Him a man after His own heart.

THE widely different judgments which Holy Scripture leads us to form respecting Saul and David is a subject which occupies much attention when we are reading the First Book of Samuel; and it comes clearly into view in the first lesson for this afternoon's[1] service. The contrast, indeed, must strike even the less careful readers of the Bible: and it often occasions perplexity to some of those who read their Bibles with the greatest care. But its difficulties, whatever they are, are not greater than its instructiveness; and therefore we may, on the present occasion, attempt to consider it in the very limited measure which alone is possible here and now.

I.

The impression which Saul makes upon an average reader, at least at first, is, beyond question, a favourable impression. The salient points of his character engage our sympathy; and this sympathy is deepened when we con-

[1] The Fourth Sunday after Trinity.

sider the misfortunes of his later life and its tragical close. Saul, indeed, had many of the qualifications which go to make a man popular. To begin with, his personal appearance, especially as a young man, was such as commands admiration from a large number of people in all generations. He was, we are told, "a choice young man, and a goodly; there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upwards he was higher than any of the people."[1] In a rude age he was thus marked out to be a king by the size and symmetry of his physical frame; and his habits were such as to rouse the enthusiasm of a people who had to fight for their lives and property. Saul was before all things a soldier. He was never without his spear—a long spear like that which is said to have been carried by Goliath, and the like of which the Bedouins carry at the present day. Not only when he went forth to battle, with a diadem on his head and a bracelet on his arm, but also when he rested in his house, as David played before him, he held his spear in his hand. It was at his side when he sat at meals facing his son Jonathan: it lay on his bolster while he slept at Hachilah in the wilderness of Ziph in his pursuit of David.

To his personal appearance and martial habits Saul added qualities of mind and character which are always valuable in a ruler of men, and which were especially valuable to his countrymen when he was their king. His courage and resolution are beyond question. When he came to the throne, Israel was to all intents and purposes a conquered people. As we have just heard, there was a Philistine garrison quartered at Geba—in Saul's own tribe—as it might seem, on his property. Against the thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen and uncounted infantry of the Philistine host, Saul

[1] 1 Sam. ix. 2.

could then only muster three thousand adherents, who dwindled away to six hundred; while after Jonathan's exploit at Michmash,—which would have been impossible but for his father's resolution not to yield to very adverse circumstances,—the Philistines were driven back to their own territory. The effect of Saul's courage is seen in the altered relations between Israel and the various races who, under the Judges, had poured over its territory from beyond the Jordan and the Dead Sea, bringing ruin and misery with them. Israel, under this her first king, no longer acts on the defensive; Moab, Ammon, Edom, Zobah, Amalek, are attacked and conquered: "whithersoever Saul turned he vexed them."[1]

Not that Saul was only a rude soldier of daring and courage; he had other and higher qualities. Had it not been so, he never would have been regarded with the affection with which he inspired, in very different circumstances, first Samuel, and afterwards David. Samuel's loyalty and affection for Saul are very remarkable, especially when we remember that Samuel had entreated the people not to choose any king at all, and that the choice of Saul meant the rejection of Samuel in his old age after a long life of service.[2] Yet something there was in Saul which drew out the aged prophet's affectionate sympathy. When Samuel first met Saul he saluted him as the man on whom was all the desire of Israel. When Samuel anointed Saul king, he "kissed him, and said, Is it not because the Lord hath anointed thee to be captain over His inheritance?"[3] When Saul had sinned away his opportunities, and was altogether in wayward rebellion against God, "Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death: nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul."[4] This conduct on Samuel's part implies in Saul qualities

[1] 1 Sam. xiv. 47.
[2] *Ib.* viii. 1-10.
[3] *Ib.* x. 1.
[4] *Ib.* xv. 35.

which inspired personal affection, and made Samuel's relations with him more than those of official deference. And the same feeling is to be traced in David, at a time when David was subjected to the most undeserved ill-treatment at the hands of Saul. Consider David's bearing and language to Saul, first in the cave of Engedi,[1] and afterwards on the hill of Hachilah:[2] it implies something more than disinterested loyalty for the monarch—namely, personal affection for the man.

Of the higher qualities of Saul's natural character which inspired this affection, the first was—I do not say his humility, but—his modesty. Modesty, unlike humility, is not inconsistent with certain forms of pride; it is a natural virtue, good as far as it goes, and certainly attractive. Saul was modest. It is plain, from the account of his elevation to the throne, that he had no wish for such a position. It came upon him unexpectedly when he was seeking his father's asses. When Samuel first proposed it, Saul replied: "Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me?"[3] When Samuel had solemnly anointed Saul, Saul said nothing of his elevation, even to his relations; he left it to Samuel to do so if he thought well. "And Saul's uncle said, Tell me, I pray thee, what Samuel said unto you. And Saul said unto his uncle, He told us plainly that the asses were found. But of the matter of the kingdom, whereof Samuel spake, he told him not."[4] When a number of his new subjects "despised him," and, failing in the ordinary usage of Eastern courtesy, "brought him no presents," he betrayed no annoyance or irritation: he "held his peace."[5]

Closely allied to his modesty was his capacity for gener-

[1] 1 Sam. xxiv. 1-19. [2] *Ib.* xxvi. 1-20.
[3] *Ib.* ix. 21. [4] *Ib.* x. 15, 16. [5] *Ib.* 27.

osity towards opponents. When the Ammonite invasion had spread a new terror and confusion throughout the land, Saul, king though he was, was tending cattle: "he came after the herd out of the field."[1] He ordered a general levy, and the Ammonites were defeated. Then, in the reaction of public feeling which followed, a cry arose that those who had opposed Saul's elevation to the throne should be put to death. Saul would not hear of it. "There shall not a man," he said, "be put to death this day."[2]

Certainly Saul was much beside all this. He was proud; he was reserved; he was haughty; he was obstinate: in his later years he was a prey to irrational and capricious jealousy. But, especially in his early life, he had qualities which are always valued and valuable, and which explain the affection with which he was regarded by those who knew him. Moreover, his reign was on the whole, and in the civil or political sense, as has been already implied, of benefit to his country.

And yet, with this personal character and this note of God's assistance—for such it was under the Old Covenant—Saul had upon him almost from the first the presentiments of disaster and disgrace. He had not reigned more than two years when the words in the text were addressed to him by Samuel: "Thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord hath sought Him a man after His own heart."

II.

When we turn to David we find it difficult, at first, to explain this phrase, "the man after God's own heart," thus used by Samuel by way of contrast to Saul. For David's failings are written large in the page of Holy Scripture; and they seem at first sight to make such an expression unintelligible, or at least exaggerated.

[1] 1 Sam. xi. 5. [2] *Ib.* xi. 13.

In point of natural excellencies Saul and David had—at least, while each was a young man—certain points in common. If David could not rival Saul's stature, his activity and his muscular strength were exceptional: his feet, he tells us, were like those of the gazelle, and his arms could break even a bow of steel.[1] Both Saul and David were men of personal prowess and of personal courage; and David resembled Saul in his modest estimate of himself and in his generous conduct upon occasions towards others. When Samuel had already marked him out for a great career, David returned without hesitation to his humble duties among his father's herds on the Bethlehem hills; cheerfully acquiescing in what promised to be a life of undisturbed obscurity, as though Samuel's mission to Bethlehem had been only a passing dream. And David's generous temper is apparent in his conduct towards Saul, when the latter was seeking to take his life, and was himself twice in his power. Nothing could be more chivalrous than David's bearing towards a powerful and implacable enemy at Engedi and Hachilah. This generosity of temper is especially apparent in his conduct after the suppression of Absalom's rebellion. The passionate grief for Absalom, the pardon of Shimei, the partial reinstatement of Mephibosheth, the reward of Barzillai, all illustrate a natural disposition which resembles, while it transcends, the finer side of his patron's character.

But there are dark traits in David, which the Bible makes no attempt to disguise. Nothing in the annals of Oriental courts can well exceed the base intrigue with Bathsheba and the cowardly murder of Uriah. No cruelty towards a conquered army could well be greater than that with which David treated the Ammonites. And although another side of his failings has been much exaggerated by some ancient and several modern critics, there are traces

[1] Ps. xviii. 33, 34.

of deceitfulness in David which recall his ancestor Jacob and impair the nobility and beauty of the general impression he leaves on us.

And yet, in contrast to Saul, he has on him, from the first, the notes of God's especial approval. His trials and misfortunes only establish or renew his prosperity. His long persecution by Saul leads to his succession to the throne. Absalom's rebellion only makes his rule more secure than ever in Jerusalem. Notwithstanding some domestic troubles, the closing years of his life might seem to illustrate his own picture of the good man: "He shall be like a tree planted by the water-side, that will bring forth his fruit in due season: his leaf also shall not wither, and look, whatsoever he doeth, it shall prosper." [1] All through there is upon David a presentiment of acceptance, as upon Saul, especially as the years pass on, there is more and more plainly a note of reprobation.

III.

If it seems at first sight that there is something arbitrary in the different estimates which Holy Scripture itself leads us to form of Saul and David, let us look once more at Saul, and ask ourselves what it is that is especially wanting in him. Is it not this, that Saul gives no evidence, as far as the Bible account of him goes, of having upon and within him the permanent influence of religion, —of having the fear and love of God in his heart? Not that Saul abjured the profession of religion. He acquiesced in what he found established among his subjects,—the Mosaic Revelation and Ritual. He once went so far as to build an altar. He reserved, so he said, the best of the Amalekite flocks and herds for sacrifice. He had about him the ministers of religion in camp and council; when Samuel the prophet ceased to attend him, his army was

[1] Ps. i. 3, 4.

followed by the high priest, Ahimelech. But his bearing towards such persons is not that of a man who has distinctly before his eyes the Being Whose representatives they were. Even before he was king he seems to have thought of the great and saintly prophet Samuel as of a sort of professional wizard, who would tell him his way for a fee,—"the fourth part of a shekel of silver."[1] And the general impression among his contemporaries about Saul's character finds voice in the question, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"[2]—when the Spirit of God, on one occasion, came upon him, and he prophesied. That he should be thus associated with the proclamation of any religious truth seemed quite out of character to those who knew him best.

Saul's real feeling about religious matters displays itself on the two occasions which led to the sentence of rejection pronounced on him by Samuel. Of these, the first is before us in the lesson for this afternoon.

Saul had collected an army to oppose the Philistines; and while he waited for Samuel to offer sacrifice, his people lost heart and began to disperse. Saul thought, no doubt, that he must, if he could, put a stop to desertions which threatened the ruin of his army. But no such necessity could of itself invest him with the right to offer sacrifice; and in undertaking to do so he implied his indifference to God's appointments respecting all matters of the kind. Why could not one person sacrifice as well as another? Why not he, the king, at least just as well as Samuel, only a prophet? Where was the sense of risking the safety of the army out of consideration for a mere matter of form? It is a temper not unknown to our own day, which regards God's appointments in respect of the ministers of His Church and the means of grace as matters of indifference, even when it does not go so far as to be indifferent on the subject whether God has made any

[1] 1 Sam. ix. 8. [2] *Ib.* x. 12.

appointments at all. Saul, no doubt, would have said to himself that he was a practical man in a difficult situation, who could not allow a great national interest to be imperilled for the sake of technical propriety, such as would weigh with a clerically-minded person like Samuel. And what was Samuel's judgment? "Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord which He commanded thee. . . . Thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord hath sought Him a man after His own heart."

The same temper is observable in Saul when he was ordered to go and smite the sinners, the Amalekites, and utterly destroy them and their cattle. This sentence on the Amalekites, long since pronounced, had been delayed: it is to be explained, like the sentences of extermination on the Canaanites, as justified by the moral corruption of the condemned races. Of this sentence Saul was the appointed executioner, and he only executed as much of it as fell in with his inclination. "He destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword," but he spared the best of the flocks and the herds, and he spared the king, Agag.[1] The first particular of his disobedience was occasioned by his wish to be popular: he "feared the people, and obeyed their voice."[2] The second was probably due to his feeling for a brother monarch, a feeling which, however natural at other times, ought not to have arrested obedience to a Divine command. Certainly Saul's conduct in respect of Agag did not arise from any unwillingness to shed blood. He had no such scruples to prevent him from attempting the extermination of the Gibeonites, although they ought to have been protected by Joshua's oath, which pledged their safety in the midst of Israel. He did not shrink from insisting on the slaughter of the high priest Ahimelech and his colleagues by the hands of the fierce

[1] 1 Sam. xv. 8, 9. [2] *Ib.* 24.

Doeg, the Edomite, even when his own guards had refused to obey the impious order. If he was really tender-hearted and liberal, he had learnt to exhibit these qualities in any direction rather than that of the religion which he was bound to uphold. The truth was, that he was at heart indifferent to the command of God, and thought himself at liberty to disobey just as much of it as the feeling or convenience of the moment might suggest.

It is no objection to this view of Saul's mind, as being in reality unconcerned with the claims of God and the Unseen World, that he showed himself anxious for some superhuman guidance when, on the eve of his death, he stole round the base of the Little Hermon to Endor, to consult the witch. We see the same thing every day of our lives; men who have scornfully rejected the Christian faith are constantly haunted by weird or grotesque superstitions. The human soul is made for faith in the Unseen; and if its deep craving be not satisfied by the One Supreme Reality, and what He has told us about Himself, it will seek satisfaction in quarters which faith would condemn even more earnestly than reason. Saul prostrate in terror before the real or supposed ghost of Samuel, on the eve of the fatal battle of Mount Gilboa, represents on a tragic scale the common Nemesis of religious indifference. Brethren, great moral catastrophes do not come without long antecedent preparation. For years the thought of God had meant less and less for Saul, and accordingly Saul had been more and more left to himself. And the end illustrated those stern words which were read to us last Friday afternoon:—

> "Ye have set at nought all My counsel,
> And would none of My reproof:
> I also will laugh at your calamity;
> I will mock when your fear cometh;
> When your fear cometh as desolation,
> And your destruction cometh as a whirlwind."[1]

[1] Prov. i. 24-26; from the First Lesson for the Afternoon Service of July 16.

IV.

Now it was precisely in this respect that Saul presented so great a contrast to David. David, in spite of his grievous falls, had upon his heart and conscience continually the impress—awful, yet most fascinating—of the Majesty, the Beauty, the Tenderness, the encompassing Presence, the boundless Magnificence of God. This great possession remained with him throughout his life: he has admitted us to the secrets of his soul, at almost every stage of his eventful history. When a shepherd-boy on the hills round Bethlehem; when in military command in the court and camp of Saul; when living the life of a hunted exile and outlaw on the Philistine plain, or in the deserts which lie along the west shore of the Dead Sea; when reigning as a king over his own tribe at Hebron, or over all Israel in Jerusalem; when founding the Holy City on the site of the captured stronghold of the Jebusites, or when bringing the Ark to it, or organising and investing with such splendour as he could command, the service of God,—he takes us at each stage fully into his confidence in psalms which could be none but his, psalms through which there runs a vein at once dignified and pathetic, to which others do not attain, and which is the mark of a soul of rare and lofty temper.

Nay, David associates us with his experiences, not only in his triumphs, but in his deep and unspeakable humiliations. We know what he feels and thinks after his sin with Bathsheba, and as he flies a dishonoured exile before his rebellious son: and he is always true to this ruling characteristic of his life, that in his fear or his exultation, in his penitence or his joy, in his struggle or in his repose, in thought or in action, God has the first place in his heart and his intellect—God's approval, God's condemnation, God's Works and Will, are his first concern. This

—the preoccupation of his life—makes him, even in the camp and on the throne, a sort of enthusiast, on whom the world sits lightly, and who cares not for its unfavourable opinion, if only he is loyal to his unseen and awful Master. "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of Thee."[1] One cannot imagine these words in the mouth of Saul. One cannot imagine Saul—the cool-headed man of the world—conducting himself as did David, when the Ark was removed in state from the house of Obed-edom, near Kirjath-jearim, to Jerusalem. David is at the height of his political power; but his royal robes are cast aside; he is dressed in the white linen garments of the priesthood: he plays, as in the days of his old shepherd minstrel life, upon stringed instruments; he joins with unrestrained enthusiasm in one of those sacred dances which in early and later times have often in the East expressed profound religious emotion.[2] We know what Saul's daughter Michal, who inherited something of her father's temper, thought and said of him: we know how she was rebuked.[3] And the same disposition is shown in David's anxiety about the temple which he was not permitted to build, about the priesthood which he ordered and organised, about all that related to the services of religion. Even his terrible sins of lust and bloodshed do but throw his deep repentance into stronger relief, as the expression of his soul's inmost feelings towards God:

> "Against Thee only have I sinned,
> And done this evil in Thy sight:
> That Thou mightest be justified in Thy saying,
> And clear when Thou art judged.
> Thou shalt purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean:
> Thou shalt wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
> Cast me not away from Thy presence,
> And take not Thy holy Spirit from me.

[1] Ps. lxxiii. 24. [2] 2 Sam. vi. 12-15. [3] *Ib.* 16-23.

O give me the comfort of Thy help again,
And stablish me with Thy princely Spirit.
Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God,
And my tongue shall sing of Thy righteousness."[1]

This is the reason why David is called, in contrast to Saul, the man after God's own heart. Certainly David's sins were not after God's own heart (may He forgive the blasphemer that would dare to suggest that they were!); but beyond and beneath those sins there was a permanent character of soul, instinct with the fear and with the love of God, that survived and conquered them. There was, so far as we know, or can see, nothing corresponding to this in Saul. There is no event in Saul's life which is at once so cruel and base as David's sin with the wife of the murdered Uriah: but then there was nothing in Saul that could issue in David's heart-broken repentance. It is the difference between cold, tranquil, decorous indifference to the real claims of God upon our human life, and a fear of God and a love of God which are, upon the whole, the governing forces in the soul, even though, erewhile, their beauty is defaced or obscured by the smoke and ruin of insurrectionary passion. It is on account of this lofty temper, that David stands out in the Bible as the occupant of so great a place, midway between the Patriarchs and the Promised Seed; receiving the prophecies, and then expanding and handing them on to Christendom; a prophet himself of the highest inspiration; a figure of Him That was to come; a great teacher of truth and guide of souls, living on in the Church to the end of time, in the authority of his writings and in the deep significance of his history.

Saul and David are lasting types of human character, as man from age to age, and under different dispensations, finds himself in contact with religion. Saul and David live

[1] Ps. li. 4, 7, 11, 12, 14.

on in their representatives at the present day. Lives, on the whole decorous, illustrated even by undoubted and high natural virtues, but based on a deep, if not a reasoned indifference to the Will of God, are lived side by side with lives open to grave criticism on account of conspicuous failings, yet based at bottom on a true fear and love of God, which lasts on under and in spite of the imperfection of the service rendered to Him. Saul is the more popular character with the world at large: the world likes his mixture of generosity and haughtiness, and his jaunty carelessness about all that points to the mystery and the responsibility of human life. David, too, is unquestionably vulnerable; and keen-sighted and unfriendly critics are always hard at work upon the inconsistencies which they detect between his practice and his professions. Nevertheless, it is better to have our part with David than with Saul; with a loyalty to God that is not always consistent, rather than with an outward propriety, if so it be, that is never really loyal. We Christians cannot indeed incur only David's guilt if we fall into David's sins. Members of Christ, we cannot plead that we were "shapen in iniquity,"[1] as though the Grace of the Redeemer had done nothing to repair the original defect. The least in the kingdom of heaven is, in respect of grace and privilege, greater than the greatest of the ancient saints: but happy for us will it be, if, with our advantages, we can attain to anything like that devoted and affectionate temper for which David was conspicuous, which sincerely fears and loves the Being Whom it has set always before it,[2] and which therefore makes the man who possesses it, as a creature who has learnt the true secret of his existence, always and everywhere dear to his Creator's heart.

[1] Ps. li. 5. [2] *Ib.* xvi. 9.

SERMON X.

DAVID PREPARING FOR THE TEMPLE.

1 CHRON. xxii. 5.

And David said, Solomon my son is young and tender, and the house that is to be builded for the Lord must be exceeding magnifical, of fame and of glory throughout all countries: I will therefore now make preparation for it. So David prepared abundantly before his death.

THE first lessons of the Sundays after Trinity have brought us near to the close of David's life. His great sin and his great domestic sorrow are now well in the background; and he is making ready to leave the scene in which he has played so great a part. These last years of his life are mainly concerned with one subject, which may occupy us this afternoon,—David's preparation for the building of the temple. In considering it, we follow the narrative of the Book of Chronicles, to which the lesson for the day [1] guides us. The chronicler, we may observe, differs from the writer of the Kings, as a church historian might differ from a religiously-minded civil historian. The chronicler is chiefly interested in the worship of God and all that belongs to it; the writer of the Kings, in the history of the State, although considered from a religious point of view. In the Kings we read much about the sovereign, and those prophets whose ministry immediately affected the throne: in the Chronicles we read more about the priesthood. The Books of Kings are a civil history which cannot leave the Church out of sight; the Books of Chronicles are a church history which

[1] Seventh Sunday after Trinity.

cannot ignore the civil power. In the Kings the supernatural side and import of events is by no means forgotten; in the Chronicles a prominence is assigned to it, which constantly throws light upon the true religious import of the earlier narrative. It is instructive to compare in detail these two inspired sources of information: but here it must suffice to have suggested the comparison, while we follow the course of the lesson for the day.

I.

We have first of all to consider the motive which set David to work in preparing for the building of the temple. And it greatly concerns us to note that this motive was thankfulness for a great mercy.

After David's numbering the people,—an act of ostentation which was displeasing to Almighty God,—the country was visited by a pestilence, in which seventy thousand Israelites perished. The deadly disease had reached Jerusalem: and in the crowded and unwholesome streets of the old Jebusite city the number of victims would have been inevitably great. The account in the Chronicles brings more fully into view than does the narrative in the Kings the unseen agency to which the visitation was immediately due.

"And God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it: and as he was destroying, the Lord beheld, and He repented Him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed, It is enough, stay now thine hand. And the angel of the Lord stood by the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite. And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the Lord stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces."[1]

[1] 1 Chron. xxi. 15, 16.

Few if any sites in Palestine are less open to reasonable question than the threshing-floor of Araunah or Ornan the Jebusite. Its owner was a native of the old Canaanitish city of Jebus, which David had captured some years before. Probably he was a member of the royal family: he had been allowed to retain and reside on his property, which was on Mount Moriah, outside the walls of ancient Jebus, and between it and the Mount of Olives.

In those early days Mount Moriah still retained its natural form: it was a conical hill, with a rocky summit, covering a natural cavern, that had been enlarged by the hand of man; and it sloped gradually down, in layers of limestone rock, to the Tyropœon on one side, and the valley of the Kedron on the other. As yet the great works by which Solomon built up a level platform round this cone had not been begun; but when they were completed the natural rock still projected, as it still projects, above the vast artificial accumulation around it. It is this rock which gives its name to the mosque which ever since the date of the Mohammedan Conquest has been built over it,—the Mosque of the Dome of the Rock. The rock, in fact, occupies the greater part of the space beneath the dome, which is the great feature of the Moslem building, and it is regarded with no less interest by its Moslem guardians than by the Jewish and Christian pilgrims who occasionally visit it. The rock is about sixty feet across; and on its south-east side is an excavated chamber, averaging about seven feet high, to which one descends by a short flight of steps from the floor of the mosque. This chamber was the threshing-floor of Araunah; and on the summit of the rock above was offered the first of those sacrifices which, with a comparatively slight interruption during the Captivity, were regularly offered on this consecrated spot for a thousand years.

It was here, in a moment of deep thankfulness to God for His mercy in arresting the pestilence, that David resolved upon building the temple, as a thank-offering. The first direction on the subject came from the prophet Gad, who counselled David to set up an altar to the Lord in or at the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite. The account of what follows, in the narrative of the Chronicles,[1] is especially vivid. The terror of Ornan's sons at the sight of the angel; the advance of Ornan from his threshing-floor to meet the king; his prostration before David; and then the generous rivalry between the two—Ornan anxious to place everything at David's disposal without any equivalent, and David resolutely bent upon not offering to God that which had cost him nothing: all this leads up to David's sacrifice on the summit of the rock. As before in the case of Manoah,[2] and afterwards in that of Elijah,[3] the sacrificial offering was answered by fire: a flash of lightning assured David that he was accepted, and then a sudden and generous inspiration led him to resolve on a much nobler effort to express his thankfulness: the threshing-floor of Araunah should be the site of the temple. "This," he exclaimed, "is the house of the Lord God; and this is the altar of the burnt-offering for Israel."[4]

What Christian can doubt that He Who cares more for our spiritual than our temporal well-being, more for our eternal than for our present happiness, sends us deliverances from earthly calamities not merely or chiefly that we may be delivered, but that our hearts may rise in thankfulness to Himself? The soul gains more by the effort of thankfulness than the body has gained by deliverance from physical mischief; the deliverance without the thankfulness is a failure, baulking the providential purpose of God. Yet how often is it witnessed even in Christian

[1] 1 Chron. xxi. 20-28.
[2] Judg. xiii. 19, 20.
[3] 1 Kings xviii. 36-38.
[4] 1 Chron. xxii. 1.

families, in Christian lives! Too often we treat God's mercies as a matter of course; while we complain of His judgments as though He were guilty of doing us a wrong, or of taking a liberty with us, in inflicting them. Too often, out of the ten lepers who are cleansed, one only returns to give glory to God.[1] Life would be brighter and stronger if it were otherwise,—if each mercy were the occasion of a resolution to do some piece of good work for God. The smaller incidents of life are transfigured by the spirit of thankfulness; Araunah's threshing-floor becomes much more than a threshing-floor: "the house of the Lord God,—the altar of burnt-offering for Israel."

II.

Next, observe the high estimate David had formed of what he had set himself to do. "The house," he said, "that is to be builded for the Lord must be exceeding magnifical, of fame and of glory throughout all countries."

His feeling was, that if anything was to be attempted by him in the service of God, it must be on a splendid scale: that a great effort was due, first of all, to God Himself, as being what He is; and next for the sake of those who did not know Him, the surrounding heathen peoples, who must not think meanly of what God's servants thought to be due to His service.

Had David lived in our day, and taken some of its ruling principles for granted, he would have expressed himself, I fear, differently. No doubt he would have said, "A house must be builded for the Lord: the tabernacle and the altar of burnt-offering cannot always remain in the high place of Gibeon. But although necessary, it need not be expensive. The first thing to do is to extend, beautify, and fortify Jerusalem: to expend what wealth

[1] St. Luke xvii. 12-18.

there is in the royal treasury in augmenting the State and establishing the position of the dynasty; to provide, in short, for immediate practical needs, and then do what may be done economically to satisfy religious sentiment. "The house of the Lord," he would have said, "must indeed be builded, but it must be exceeding cheap."

My brethren, if anything is fatal to greatness in human endeavour, in art, in work, in character, it is a stinted estimate of what we have to do. The artist who has a great ideal before his mind's eye may not after all produce a great picture; his materials may be bad; his spirit and genius may fail him at the moment of execution. But the artist who has no ideal before him, or only a poor and meagre one, cannot hope to succeed. It is so with all forms of external enterprise; it is so with that most serious of all enterprises, the formation of character. If we set out by saying, "It is impossible to attain to anything great or noble," we certainly never shall attain to it. Our only chance lies in forming a high estimate of what we have to be or do, and in keeping it well before us. We may never reach it after all, for reasons beyond our power, or for reasons within our power; but it is certain that in order to reach it, we must set it before us. We must make up our minds that the house of the Lord—whether material or spiritual—must be "exceeding magnifical."

Here it may be suggested that David's anxiety to erect a splendid building in honour of Almighty God belonged to the infancy of religious life, when men still used earthly standards to measure the things of heaven, and knew not that the only true worship of God is a worship in spirit and in truth.[1]

Certainly, no honest student of David's Psalms can maintain that he was ignorant of the true meaning of

[1] St. John iv. 24.

spiritual worship, or that he thought more of the things of sense than of the action of the soul, in his approach to the All-Holy. Had David lived to witness the building of the temple he would have exclaimed with Solomon: "Behold, the heaven, and the heaven of heavens, cannot contain Thee, how much less this house that I have builded!"[1] But David's spirituality was not of that unwise kind which imperils the very existence of religion among men by doing away with all the symbols of its presence: and David did not practise upon himself that particular kind of self-deceit, not perhaps unknown among ourselves, which talks earnestly about the spirituality of true religion, while in reality it is mainly intent on buttoning up its pocket, lest it should have to make any serious sacrifice for the promotion of religion at all. No doubt, worship, to be accepted, must be the act of man's spirit: but worship will not be the less spiritual, when man has done his uttermost, in his poor way, to express in outward and material structures his sense of the unapproached Magnificence of God. In this connection it is always well to remember who it was that objected to the waste, as he called it, of the alabaster box of ointment on our Lord's Sacred Body—and why.[2]

III.

But the great distinction of David's work of preparation for the temple is its unselfishness. David knew from an early date that the work was to be carried on and completed by others. The Voice of God speaking through conscience had told him that hands which had been so deeply stained as his with human blood were not the hands to raise a temple to the All-Merciful.

One of the sternest lessons which a man learns in ad-

[1] 1 Kings viii. 27. [2] St. Matt. xxvi. 7-9; St. John xii. 3-6.

vancing life is the disabling power of past sin. Long after we have, as we trust, sincerely repented of sin, it haunts us with its legacy of a dimmed moral eyesight and an enfeebled will. And even where these effects do not follow—as in David's case they did not follow—it remains as a memory which tells us, when we would attempt something beyond the work of average men, something heroic or sublime, something that belongs to the career of the saints, that, other matters apart, we are not the men to do it. That fatal whisper from the recesses of memory is reinforced by the voice of truth and justice; and as we listen we are silent. "And David said to Solomon, My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build an house unto the Name of the Lord my God: but the Word of the Lord came to me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto My Name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in My sight. Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest. . . . He shall build an house for My Name. . . ."[1]

We do not at once understand what it must have cost David to make this announcement to his youthful son: the old do not take the young into confidence after this fashion without effort and suffering. David's life, let us remember, was, upon the whole, the life of a man who had succeeded. He had begun as a shepherd boy, and he was the first man, beyond all dispute, in Israel. He had been an object of royal displeasure and persecution, and he had lived to occupy the throne of his persecutor. He had been assailed by a rebellion, which for a while prospered; but in the event his rule had been more firmly established than before. He had raised Israel from the condition of a small disorganised principality—the prey of surrounding powers—to rank with the great monarchies

[1] 1 Chron. xxii. 7-10.

on the Nile and the Euphrates. He had succeeded; and success begets the taste for success; it is impatient of obstacles, of disappointments, of hesitations. It was natural for David to wish to crown his successes with the work that lay nearest his heart: and he must have felt that, as far as natural capacities went, he could easily do so. If he was not actually wealthy, yet he had wealth within reach: he had an almost unlimited command of unpaid labour: he was on good terms with neighbouring powers, who would supply the necessary materials. Then he was by character and inclination a good organiser, a man who took delight in managing a difficult enterprise, a man with a taste for details, a taste for business. This appears in the accounts which we possess of his careful reorganisation of the army. Saul had done something in this direction; but David carried out the work on a great scale, and in great detail; the whole fighting force of Israel was by him made easily available for military purposes. The same genius for organisation is observable in David's enactments respecting the administration of justice, the regulation of finance, the promotion of pastoral and agricultural improvements, the creation of a council or court of advisers to the reigning monarch, the appointment of officers, like Jehoshaphat the recorder, Adoram the tax-collector, and a prince, or as we should say, a lord-lieutenant, to each of the tribes. So, again, in the delicate distribution of duties between the prophets Gad and Nathan; in the co-ordination of the representatives of the two branches of the family of Aaron, Abiathar and Zadok; in the arrangement of the choir under Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun; in the subdivision of duties assigned to the Levites, as guardians of the treasures and guardians of the gates; in the twenty-four orders or courses of the priests, and other particulars, we see the same talent for organisation entering into the province

of religious institutions. Nothing in the way of administration was too great for David to master; nothing too small to command his attention: he kept his eye at once on general principles and on minute details, and this made him the great ruler that he unquestionably was. Such a man could not but be conscious of his power; could not but desire, even passionately, to have the highest scope for its exercise; could not but experience a human sense of disappointment when it became clear to him that this would not, could not, be.

"And David said to Solomon, My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build an house unto the Name of the Lord my God." How much feeling is compressed into these simple words! They represent the fervour, the passion, the tender longing, the strong resolve of his own Psalms. "The Lord Himself is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup."[1] "They have children at their desire: and leave the rest of their substance for their babes. But as for me, I will behold Thy Presence in righteousness."[2] "The King shall rejoice in Thy strength, O Lord: exceeding glad shall he be of Thy salvation."[3] "My praise is of Thee in the great congregation: my vows will I perform in the sight of them that fear Him."[4] "One thing have I desired of the Lord, which I will require: even that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the fair beauty of the Lord, and to visit His temple."[5] These are but sparks from the flame which ever burnt in David's soul. Who can doubt that the discovery that he would not be allowed to express his devotion in one supreme effort, looked forward to for many years, must have cost him a shock, a pang, which we may not easily take the measure of? What would a less noble character than David's have done on finding himself thus

[1] Ps. xvi. 6. [2] *Ib.* xvii. 15, 16. [3] *Ib.* xxi. 1.
[4] *Ib.* xxii. 25. [5] *Ib.* xxvii. 4.

debarred by God and conscience from carrying out the great work on which he had set his heart? Would he not have said, "Well, since I am not to build the temple, there is an end of the matter: I shall wash my hands of any further interest in it. There is plenty of other work for me to do, and I will forget what I can only remember with annoyance. Solomon my son will build the temple: it will be his glory to have done so; the temple will be known in history as Solomon's temple; and as he is to get the credit, he may just as well have the labour and trouble of the undertaking. I have made up my mind: I shall have nothing more to do with it."

No, brethren, that was not David's way. For David did not think of the temple as having to be built, either for his own glory, or for Solomon's glory; but for the glory of God. If it was to be built for God's glory, the important thing was that it should be built when and as it could be built; it did not matter much by whom, if only it could be built for God's glory. To have a hand in the building it, however small; to contribute, however indirectly and unostentatiously, to so great an object—this was a privilege and a joy which carried with it its own reward. If the temple could not be built by David, David could prepare for the building of it by Solomon. And he did so prepare with all his heart: the work could not have occupied his attention more completely, if he himself had had to carry it through.

"And David commanded to gather together the strangers that were in the land of Israel; and he set masons to hew wrought stones to build the house of God. And David prepared iron in abundance for the nails for the doors of the gates, and for the joinings; and brass in abundance without weight; also cedar trees in abundance: for the Zidonians and they of Tyre brought much

cedar wood to David."[1] "And David said to Solomon, Behold, in my trouble I have prepared for the house of the Lord an hundred thousand talents of gold, and a thousand thousand talents of silver; and of brass and iron without weight; for it is in abundance: timber also and stone have I prepared. . . . Moreover, there are workmen with thee in abundance, hewers and workers of stone and timber, and all manner of cunning men for every manner of work."[2] Nor was this all. David's interest did not stop at the collection of funds, the furnishing materials, the marshalling a body of skilled workmen. He prepared designs for every part of the contemplated building.

"Then," says the chronicler, "David gave to Solomon his son the pattern of the porch, and of the houses thereof, and of the treasuries thereof, and of the upper chambers thereof, and of the inner parlours thereof, and of the place of the mercy-seat, and the pattern of all that he had by the Spirit, of the courts of the house of the Lord, and of all the chambers round about. . . . He gave of gold by weight for things of gold, for all instruments of all manner of service; silver also for all instruments of silver by weight, for all instruments of every kind of service; even the weight for the candlesticks of gold, and for their lamps of gold, by weight for every candlestick, and for the lamps thereof: and for the candlesticks of silver by weight, both for the candlestick, and also for the lamps thereof, according to the use of every candlestick. And by weight he gave gold for the tables of shewbread, for every table; and likewise silver for the tables of silver: also pure gold for the fleshhooks, and the bowls, and the cups: and for the golden basons he gave gold by weight for every bason; and for the altar of incense refined gold by weight; and gold for the pattern of the chariot of the cherubims, that spread out their

[1] 1 Chron. xxii. 2-4. [2] *Ib.* 14, 15.

wings, and covered the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord."[1]

Be sure of this, brethren, that all these details of David's contribution to the future temple are not recorded for nothing in the Bible. They point to a great truth—the preciousness of work unrecognised by man—unrewarded here. They suggest that in this life of shadows labour and the credit for labour do not always go hand in hand. David does the work, and Solomon is decorated with the reputation. Almost every discovery in science has been led up to by forgotten workers; the discoverer who has only taken the last step in a long journey lives in history. A minister rises in his place in Parliament to make a statement which astonishes us by its familiarity with the details of a vast and intricate subject: but while the country is ringing with his praises, the fact is that the knowledge which so astonishes it has been brought together by the patient toil of the permanent staff of the department—of clerks whose names are, perhaps, unknown beyond their own families. Much more is this the case with the best work in the Church of Christ. Doubtless there are great names in the Sacred Books, in the Church calendar—names which are pronounced with grateful reverence by successive generations of Christians as the names of foremost workmen and sufferers in the Kingdom of the Redemption. But they are, in view of the accumulation of toil and pain which has built up Christendom, comparatively few. The immense majority of workers, martyrs, saints, are unknown or forgotten—forgotten or unknown so far as this world is concerned. A day is coming, as we know, when this obscurity will end—a day in which the Lord will make up His jewels[2]—a day of bright recognition for many of those who have seemed here the lowest andthe last.

[1] 1 Chron. xxviii. 11-18.

[2] Mal. iii. 17.

It must at the same time be owned that David's self-forgetfulness in religious work is less common than might be wished in modern Christendom. The modern spirit is too individualising, or, to use a rougher and truer word, too selfish thus to work for the future with true disinterestedness. Men like to see their own work completed; they like to be able to say, "That piece of work is mine: I did it;" they would rather be recognised as the finishers of something insignificant than know themselves to be labouring for a great result, which they can never see in its completeness. And therefore so much of our religious work is poor and mean for the very reason that it is dwarfed in order to satisfy this petty religious selfishness. The old plan was to begin on a grand scale, and to be content with having achieved a fragment, in faith that others would carry forward what had been thus begun. The new plan is to begin on a very small scale, in order to gratify the worker with seeing the completion of his puny effort. Men often say despondingly, "We do not now build cathedrals like York or Lincoln." Certainly we do not. It would be well if the moral loss could be measured by the artistic failure: but a dwarfed soul is a poorer thing to look at than the most unlovely of cheap edifices in stone or brick.

If noble souls of David's temper have any anxiety on the subject, it is not lest they should be overlooked or unrewarded here. No; that, in their eyes, is by no means clearly a misfortune; since it suggests that they still may have a certain stake in the eternal future. That which they fear and dread is lest those terrible words which our Lord used of the ostentatious devotees and alms-givers and fasters in His own day, should prove true of them also: "They have their reward."[1] Work which is done for a human equivalent in reputation is not entered, we may

[1] St. Matt. vi. 2, 5, 16.

be sure of it, on the pages of the Book of Life. Work of which too much is heard here may be disinterested work which God will own, but it runs a risk which work unrecognised here does not run, of so injuring the worker's soul as to be disowned hereafter.

IV.

To conclude:—

(*a*) David's example at the close of his life suggests to all of us the duty of preparing, so far as we may, for building up the house of God in the world, after we ourselves have gone. No man's influence, whether for good or evil, ends with his death. It passes on, sometimes as a public reputation, sometimes by the more subtle but not less real influence of a private character, from soul to soul, from generation to generation. It is a blessing or a taint, as the case may be, but it is handed on. The author of an influence, of a way of looking at things, of a tone of mind, may be forgotten; but for weal or woe his work remains mingled up inextricably with the sum-total of what has been in like manner bequeathed by others. Long after it is impossible to help or warn those whom we have misled, the fatal memory of our misconduct—perhaps heartily repented of—may cling to their souls, and may continue to mislead them. How terrible, if we are permitted hereafter to know what is passing on earth—how terrible to witness the destructive ravages of an influence which has radiated from ourselves during life, when we can no longer control or check it! Something we must, each of us, contribute to the world which will outlive us; surely we should see to it that we are not contributing to the moral ruins which strew the surface of the world, but that we are preparing for the erection of some temple to God, for or within the souls of men.

(β) And David's example should encourage all those who are tempted to think that life is a failure because they can only prepare for work which will be completed by others. How often is this the case with a clergyman who is called to take charge of a very neglected parish! He knows, perhaps, that he cannot hope to be there long enough to build up God's temple in the souls of his parishioners: he is in weak health, or getting on in life, as the case may be. He can only lay things in train for a better future which will ripen after his death. He must make up his mind to encounter a certain amount of misunderstanding, to make sacrifices for which he will get no thanks, to proclaim truths which will only be heard to be rejected. Never mind; he must persevere, in his church, in his schools, in his daily intercourse with his flock, even though nothing seems to come of it. Something will come of it, when he has gone—in the days of his successor, or in another world. Something will come of it. David's generous labour is never thrown away; the Divine Son of David never forgets those who have laboured to promote His cause and His kingdom. But to work for Him amid discouragement and without return is still for all His true servants its own very sufficient reward, if they have at all learnt the spirit of that difficult but most invigorating prayer, "Show Thy servants Thy work, and their children Thy glory."[1]

[1] Ps. xc. 16.

SERMON XI.

THE FALL OF SOLOMON.

1 KINGS xi. 11.

Wherefore the Lord said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept My covenant, and My statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant.

KING SOLOMON occupies a very prominent place in the Church Services of this and last Sunday;[1] but it is at least not a place of greater prominence than is due to his real position in the history of Israel. In Solomon the as yet undivided monarchy reached its zenith of splendour; Solomon reaped the full harvest of glory for which David had toiled and suffered. In Solomon, too, the family of David entered upon its decline. He thus presents himself to us in Scripture under a twofold aspect: he is an embodiment of glory and greatness, so conspicuous, indeed, as to be a type of Christ, the King of Glory; and he is also a warning of the most serious and even tragical kind, pointing out the dangers which may surround all—the best and greatest—on this side the grave. The lesson of this afternoon leads us to consider his fall; and it would be difficult to name an Old Testament subject which ought to be more interesting or more useful and instructive.

[1] The Eighth and Ninth Sundays after Trinity.

I.

Solomon's great sin was the encouragement and the establishment of idolatry in and about Jerusalem. The great providential purpose, the predestined business, of Israel was the maintenance of faith in and worship of the One True God. For this, Israel had been made what the Bible calls a "peculiar people."[1] For this, Israel had received special ordinances, a special ritual, special and characteristic civil institutions. For this, as all the best spirits in the nation believed, Israel had been led out of the humiliation and bondage of its earliest history to its home on the Mediterranean shore, where it had already achieved first political and social security, and then empire. It was for this end that the great Lawgiver and the long succession of judges had laboured, each in his day, until the establishment of the monarchy; and David, notwithstanding the great personal sins which disfigured his life, was felt to be the man after God's own heart,[2] because, whether on his throne or in exile, whether suffering or triumphant, he never lost sight of the true work and destiny of his people, or of his own duties as its guide and ruler.

It was to this inheritance of faith and duty, consecrated by the struggles of so many generations, consecrated especially by his father's example and precept, that Solomon had succeeded. How often, in every generation, on a smaller scale, and with varying circumstances, are the substantial features of that touching scene reproduced, in which David, feeling the near approach of death, and the vast responsibilities of the life from which he is parting, bequeaths to the son of his choice a legacy of service which he himself could not hope—was not permitted—to discharge. David, as a man who had shed blood, might

[1] Deut. xxvi. 18.

[2] 1 Sam. xiii. 14.

not build the House of God:[1] but David could prepare for, he could design, he could make ready to hand, the task of Solomon.[2] Nor was Solomon unequal to his inherited trust and its great responsibilities. The leading event of his reign was the building of the temple on the site of Araunah's threshing-floor,—a temple wherein the two great objects of national reverence, the Ark from Zion and the Tabernacle from Gibeon, might both, as in a common home, find their resting-place. It was a work of seven and a half years; and Solomon gave his best, whether of work or wealth, to its completion. Gold was brought in abundance from Ophir, cedar-wood from Lebanon, copper from Cyprus, tin from Spain (if not from Britain), brass from the foundries of Succoth and Zarethan; skilled workmen came from Zidon; the existing civilisation of the Eastern world was laid under contribution; and although the result was not colossal, when compared with other temples, ancient and modern, its splendour, arising from the profuse use, within and without, of the precious metals, must have made it sparkle (to borrow Dean Milman's expression) in the morning sun like the sanctuary of an El Dorado. Not that its interest was wholly or chiefly material; it was in Solomon's eyes, as in those of the great prophet Nathan under whose counsels he acted, the expression of a great idea, the visible symbol of a great truth. It proclaimed to Israel, in a shape which met the eye, the first, the second, the third, and, at least by association, the fourth Commandments: it was a creed in stone, but it reflected the living faith of a people. Great as was its material interest among the buildings of the time, great as was its political value as consolidating the national life and supplying it with a sacred point of unity, its chief significance was religious; it attested the devotion of the monarch to the glory of God and to the religious interests

[1] 1 Chron. xxii. 8. [2] *Ib.* 14-16.

and destiny of the people over whom he ruled. And it was accepted by a visible token of God's favour and presence. As, at the Feast of Dedication, the Ark approached the temple, the psalm arose, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in;" and when the question was asked, "Who is the King of Glory?" it was replied, "The Lord strong and mighty; even the Lord mighty in battle."[1] And then, when, in a second strophe, the injunction, the question, the reply, with certain significant variations, had been repeated,[2] the greatest moment in the life of Israel as a people had arrived:—the Ark entered, was placed in its splendid shrine, and the cloud, the Glory of the Lord, the accustomed token of the Sacred Presence in that early revelation, filled the House.[3] The House was God's, and He had thus vouchsafed to claim it.

Now, it is this, the great work of Solomon's life, which throws out his apostasy into such painful relief, which makes his fall in his later age so strange, so paradoxical. Solomon, the builder of a temple which David might not build, to the One True God, raised round about the sacred city shrines to the foul idols of the neighbouring peoples,—shrines to Ashtoreth, to Moloch, to Chemosh! Solomon, who had organised the Priests and Levites, the services and sacrifices of the sacred ritual, was now encouraging, if not assisting at, rites which were cruel and impure as well as idolatrous! It is not merely the intrinsic magnitude of Solomon's offence; it is its inconsistency with the main work of his life, with what were undoubtedly for long his strongest and most enthusiastic convictions, that mainly strikes us. If it were possible, with a German scholar,[4] to think of the son of David as if he were a modern Governor-General of India, tolerating

[1] Ps. xxiv. 7, 8.
[2] *Ib.* 9, 10.
[3] 1 Kings viii. 6-11.
[4] Ewald, *History of Israel*, iii. 298.

old superstitions which he could not, if he would, suppress, the case would be different. In point of fact, Solomon introduces the new worship from abroad, and, let us observe, without any pressure, such as that to which religious men of weak resolution before now have yielded. Many a man has abandoned truth or duty when it threatened misfortune. Our Lord said, describing this class of souls, "When tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the Word, by and by they are offended."[1] But in Solomon we see a man to whom religious fidelity had brought, and was still bringing, every earthly blessing, and who yet, in the fulness of his days and honours, fell away from its requirements. The spectacle is too strange and too suggestive not to lead to an inquiry beyond.

II.

What was it, we ask, that could have tempted Solomon to practise idolatry?

(*a*) The temptation came to him, we are told, chiefly through his affections. He was not, anyhow at first, intellectually convinced that the idol-worship of the neighbouring nations was right. But "he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart."[2] As yet the pure and stern marriage law of Jesus Christ had not been given to the world, —although, as our Lord pointed out, it could appeal to the primal facts of human history;[3] Solomon's mother would not be likely to have taught her son any very high lessons of conjugal fidelity; and Solomon's practice in this matter must not be judged by the standard of the Gospel. But that which happened to him may happen with one wife as well as with seven hundred. The subtle, but entire

[1] St. Matt. xiii. 21.
[2] 1 Kings xi. 3.
[3] St. Matt. xix. 4-9.

ascendency which, in virtue of profound sympathies and laws of our human nature, may be exerted by a woman over the strongest of men, is a simple matter of fact; and it is, let me add, an influence which, in the majority of cases, is exerted with the happiest results. On the whole, women have higher aims, truer instincts, a purer and loftier conception of life than men; and the current and most true proverb, that "a bad woman is much worse than a bad man," owes its force to the fact that women, when they fall, fall deeper, as a rule, because they fall, as a rule, from a higher level. Therefore it is that women influence men as they do; sometimes undisguisedly, more often without its being suspected: and when this influence is misused the results are proportionately disastrous. Solomon's wives could do what probably no man in his empire could have done,—they perverted the heart of the wisest of men.

(β) Closely connected with this temptation was another: Solomon was the victim of a sort of false cosmopolitanism. His wide range of interests, his immense empire, his contact with men of all and no creeds, brought to him a temptation which often comes to those who, from the nature of their duties, see many sides of human life. In such cases the difficulty is to be fair, just, generous, to the convictions of others, without compromising what we ourselves know to be true: to recognise what is true in creeds which are largely false, without also shutting our eyes to their substantial falsehood. Solomon's sympathy with all forms of human thought and life would probably have gone hand in hand with his anxiety to promote and develop the world-wide commerce of his countrymen. We can trace some steps, at any rate, in the process. His trade with Egypt for horses and linen yarn was closely connected with an event which must have startled religious Israelites—who ever since the Exodus had regarded

Egypt as the worst enemy of their faith—I refer to his marriage with a daughter of the king of Egypt. She dwelt in a splendid palace outside the city of David, attended by women of her own race, but probably conforming, at least in part, to the religion of her royal husband. But when the old barrier had been so far broken down, when the taste for novelty had been so far gratified, it was not easy to stop. The court of Jerusalem a few years later was filled with women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites. They came, not as the Egyptian princess had come, with the semblance, or more, of conversion: they came on their own terms; they brought their own priests, idols, rites. Solomon, within the walls of his palace, amid the occupations of daily domestic life, breathed a heathen atmosphere; and it did its work upon him. The old lines which fenced around the creed of Sinai in the mind of every believing son of Abraham grew faint and dim in his: an easy indifference gradually supplanted the energetic faith which had reared the Temple. Might there not, he would have said to himself, be something to be urged for the various forms of Nature-worship by which Israel was surrounded? And thus Solomon was not merely content with tolerating the idolatry of his wives: he himself "went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites; and he built an high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem."[1] Carelessness became indifference; indifference, under pressure, soon became virtual apostasy.

(γ) And, thirdly, there must, of course, have been some subtle, unconquered evil in Solomon's nature, which led him to sympathise with the idol-worship thus recommended to him from without. No outward influence can

[1] 1 Kings xi. 5, 7.

really overmaster the rectitude of the regenerate will: if outward attractions or terrors prevail, it is because of weakness or rottenness within. As St. James says, when resisting the plea that temptations overmaster our weakness—if any temptation prevails, "every man is led away of his own lust, and enticed."[1] But the history of this inward sympathy with what is wrong, of its gradual, its invisible, development, up to the point at which it triumphs in outward act,—this is a weird secret, open only to the All-Seeing Eye in its completeness, although partly traceable by all of us, if we care to look within the chambers of our hearts.

III.

Thus Solomon fell. And we should take note that his fall was not arrested by causes which might have seemed likely to prevent it.

(*a*) It was not, for instance, arrested by his advanced years. It is natural to think that as we get older we get better: many a man in middle life lays the flattering unction to his soul. Or at least we imagine that, as we get older, we do not get worse; that we move, more or less necessarily, along a fixed groove of thought, and action, and feeling,—that we are confined and stiffened by formed habit,—if against any considerable improvement, so certainly against a serious decline and fall. But these assumptions are not always warranted by experience. As the years pass, and the end draws near, the course is not always upwards and onwards; it is sometimes downwards and backwards. Judas was older when he betrayed our Lord than when he became a disciple. Demas was older when, through love of this present world, he departed to Thessalonica,[2] than when he first joined St. Paul. Men

[1] St. James i. 13, 14.

[2] 2 Tim. iv. 10.

think that, as they get older, they always become more far-sighted and sensible; that they only get rid of the false enthusiasms, of the misleading hallucinations, of youth; that they retain their old interest in goodness and truth, but that it is now tempered by reflection and experience. It may be so in many cases; in many cases it certainly is not so. What really takes place too often is that conscience becomes less sensitive, the heart less tender, the sense of truth less quick and apprehensive: and this loss of the early bloom of the soul is not really compensated for by any counterbalancing advantages. No doubt age is meant, in God's providence, to bring improvement; Solomon tells us that a hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.[1] But everything depends on that appended condition. Solomon would not have disputed the modern aphorism that "no fool is so bad as an old fool," for the obvious reason that he is less capable of improvement than a young one. As age does not of itself ensure a man against spiritual or moral ruin, so it does not palliate, nay, it rather enhances and exaggerates, such ruin when it has taken place.

(β) Solomon's fall was not arrested by his knowledge —whether of things earthly or heavenly. He had, as we know, prayed for wisdom; and his prayer had been heard.[2] He was the wisest man of his time; and to this hour, far beyond the pale of the Jewish and Christian Revelations, the tradition of his consummate accomplishments is written broadly on the literature of the East. Its traditions express this by representing him as not merely the greatest of monarchs, but as the first of magicians. In fact, however, all the natural science to which man had attained in that age, all the constructive skill, all the rules and secrets of administration and government, all

[1] Prov. xvi. 31. [2] 2 Chron. i. 10, 11.

the knowledge of human nature that was then to be had, was his in the fullest sense.

Nor was Solomon's knowledge merely or mainly secular. He was a master of moral and spiritual truth: he was, as we Christians believe, a pupil and organ of the Eternal Spirit; his writings still occupy a very conspicuous place in our Bible. Solomon's Proverbs—that wonderful repository of the wisest thoughts about God and human life—show abundantly how conscious he was of the very truths which might have kept him right. He knew the claims of God, the power of temptation, the power of women, the weakness of the human heart. He was no novice—playing with forces, or trifling on the brink of precipices which he had not measured. But to know is one thing; to be or to do is another. There were some thinkers among the old Greeks, who supposed that knowledge and virtue were at bottom the same thing; that if a man were sufficiently well-informed he could not but be a good man. And there are modern speakers and writers on the subject of Education who appear to take the same rosy view of human nature, and to presume that if only people can be sufficiently provided with useful or religious knowledge the kingdom of Heaven will begin upon earth. Every generation furnishes its share of mournful experience to contradict this misapprehension; but Solomon was a conspicuous instance of a man who was not saved from doing the gravest wrong by the extent of his mental accomplishments. In point of fact, his knowledge made his fall all the deeper, but did not prevent it.

(γ) Nor was Solomon ensured against failure by his previous sincerity. As it is true for all of us that while there is life there is hope, so it is no less true for us all that while there is life there is danger. No man can be mechanically secure of heaven: there is no such thing on

earth as indefectible grace. If St. Paul could be under an apprehension lest after that he had preached to others he himself should be a castaway,[1] who shall presume that confident feeling or anything else can give him a present certificate of eventual triumph? God, no doubt, on His side, is faithful: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"[2] Certainly nothing external to us: "Neither tribulation, nor distress, nor persecution, nor peril, nor sword." But that which nothing outward can do, we, each of us, most assuredly may do; "the grey-haired saint may fall at last;"[3] the fortress which no enemy can scale may be betrayed by its defenders. God does not oblige us to serve Him by giving us His grace; His gifts do not reduce us to the level of machines; they merely enable us to make the best of that freedom which is our manhood's noblest attribute. There is no reason for questioning Solomon's sincerity in early life because in his closing days he broke away from God into paths of his own devising.

The question has been asked, and much discussion has been expended in the attempt to answer it, whether, after all, Solomon was saved or lost. That is one of those questions which we have no means of really solving. Where the giants of the ancient Church of Christ, St. Augustine and St. Chrysostom, differed, we may be content with admitting our ignorance. Nothing is gained by straining the eyes at nightfall over the edge of a precipice; we cannot search out the secrets of the Divine Judgment or of the predestination of souls. We may indeed reverently hope that one for whom God had done so much, and who had in his day done so much for the honour of God, would not have been suffered, after all, to perish outright. Certain it is that Solomon's sin brought its punishment in

[1] 1 Cor. ix. 27. [2] Rom. viii. 35.
[3] *The Christian Year*: 'Eighth Sunday after Trinity.'

this world: "I will surely rend the kingdom from thee."[1] It is ever thus; moral empire at any rate—the influence of a father, a teacher, a guide—is gone, when sin has, so to speak, sprung a leak in the character; when all that had once cast a spell over others is seen to be undermined by some fatal inconsistency. This at any rate is certain, whatever may be hoped or feared as to all that lies beyond.

And the practical lesson of such a fall as Solomon's is that perseverance in God's service is not a matter of course with any one; that it is a distinct gift or grace of God to be secured by watchfulness and prayer. We who are neither kings nor sages may take warning by the history of the wisest of kings. Bad social influences, a corrupt public opinion, above all, the weakness and treachery of our own hearts, are in league with the indefatigable enemy of our salvation; nor is age, or experience, or general cultivation, or even religious knowledge and years of faithful service, any sufficient warrant that we can never fall. Let us watch the issues—we never can fully explore the depths—of our hearts. Let us be sure that the best and most intelligent are, left to themselves, incapable of thinking rightly, of judging rightly, of acting rightly; that they are capable of falling into the worst sins, and of being irretrievably lost. Let us look constantly, humbly to God, as the Source of our strength; let us grasp the Hands which were pierced for us upon the Cross; let us ask, with the Church in to-day's Collect,[2] for the spirit to think and do always such things as be rightful; so that we who cannot do anything that is good without God, may by God be enabled to live according to His Will, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

[1] 1 Kings xi. 11. [2] Collect for the Ninth Sunday after Trinity.

SERMON XII.

THE DISOBEDIENT PROPHET.

1 KINGS xiii. 20-22.

And it came to pass, as they sat at the table, that the word of the Lord came unto the prophet that brought him back: and he cried unto the man of God that came from Judah, saying, Thus saith the Lord, Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the Lord, and hast not kept the commandment which the Lord thy God commanded thee, but camest back, and hast eaten bread and drunk water in the place of the which the Lord did say to thee, Eat no bread, and drink no water; thy carcase shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers.

FEW histories in the Bible teach us more persuasively than this the duty of obeying God's Will, so far as we know it, under all circumstances. In order to follow out the lesson, we have to consider, first of all, what was the work or mission of the prophet of Judah. Then, what was the nature of the temptations to which he was exposed. Lastly, his punishment. Let me add that it is only necessary to have the first lesson of this afternoon service before you in order to follow what I am going to say.

I.

The subject of this history has no name in Scripture except that of the Prophet of Judah—a name he must have shared with many other persons at the time. But although his name is not given, his work was of the utmost importance. He is one of that great multitude of

human beings who in all ages have been among the most influential actors on the scene of human life, without being recognised as such. In the eyes of the men of that time, Rehoboam and Jeroboam were the two important persons in Palestine. In reality, many of their subjects were really much more able to control events for good or evil; and in particular, for the moment, the prophet who came out of Judah was more important than either of them.

1. In order to understand the high nature of the mission of the prophet of Judah, we must remind ourselves of the circumstances which made Jeroboam king of Israel. When Solomon yielded to the suggestions of his idolatrous wives so far as to set up idol-shrines close to the Holy City, he was warned by the Prophet Ahijah, that, as a punishment, the ten tribes would revolt against the royal house of David during his son's reign. The old jealousy of these tribes towards Judah, suppressed during the splendid reigns of David and Solomon, broke out under the feeble and unwise rule of Rehoboam. The revolt was immediately occasioned by Rehoboam's sending Adoram, a very incompetent commissioner, to investigate some complaints of over-taxation; the commissioner was stoned, and the grandson of David only escaped a similar fate by a sudden flight. Rehoboam intended at first to subdue the revolted tribes; but he was warned by a prophet, that what had happened was divinely ordered, and that Jews must not make war upon their brethren. The ten tribes were therefore constituted as a separate kingdom under Jeroboam, who at once applied himself to the measures which were necessary to secure its independence. Thus we find him fortifying Penuel beyond the Jordan, in order to guard his realm against the conquerors of Upper Asia, and rebuilding Shechem, which had been destroyed by Abimelech, as his residence and capital.

If Jeroboam's activities had been all of this kind, there would have been no occasion for the mission of the prophet of Judah. But Jeroboam had to deal with the religious question—then, as now, much too important a factor in the religious life of a nation to be ignored by its political chiefs. I say, now as then. Some few years ago Mr. Buckle hazarded the opinion that religion was gradually becoming of less and less importance among the causes which affect the public conduct and life of nations. Since he wrote those lines, events have been busily engaged in proving their inaccuracy. We have had Europe convulsed by misunderstandings, into which religion has entered most powerfully:[1] and at this moment, whether we turn to Italy, to Spain, to Germany, to France, to Brazil, or to our own country, everywhere we are face to face with questions of the first importance, and into which religion enters more conspicuously than has been the case since the seventeenth century. It cannot be ignored—even in this material age, as it has been termed,—that passion and virtue of the human soul,—its sublimest virtue, its most enduring passion,—which we name Religion. Man cannot so far deceive himself, if he believes in another world at all, as to dream that that which affects it is of less importance than that which touches our earthly life. Religion will always command the suspicions or sincere respect of the rulers of men, for the simple reason, that whatever be the truth or falsehood of the creed to which it is devoted, religious principle is at once the purest and strongest force that can sway the conduct and control the sympathies of their subjects.

Jeroboam, like many a statesman since, looked upon Religion, not as the happiness and strength of his own life, but simply as an instrument of successful government. He appears to have anticipated, or almost to have

[1] This sermon was preached in the year 1873.

anticipated, Hume's cynical theory of an Established Church, as a means whereby a sensible government, taking possession of and satisfying the religious sentiment of the people, would protect itself against outbreaks of religious fanaticism. He saw that, if, after the separation of the ten tribes, Jerusalem should still continue to be the religious centre of the whole nation, sooner or later it would become again the political centre too. If the ten tribes were to preserve their political independence of the descendants of Solomon, they must have a separate and independent religion; and if such a religion did not exist, then it must be invented. This was Jeroboam's motive in instituting the worship of the golden calves at Dan and at Bethel—at the northern and southern extremities of his dominions. It was not idolatry proper; in the prophets Hosea and Amos the distinction is clearly drawn between the worship of created objects and the worship of God under forbidden symbols: and Jeroboam, no doubt, during his sojourn in Egypt in his early life, had caught the idea of a symbolical worship of Jehovah under this form from the worship of the Egyptian Apis. But such a worship, he must have known, was strictly forbidden to the Jews. He must have known that the worship of the golden calf cast by Aaron himself had brought on the people a sentence of extermination, from which they were only saved at the prayer of Moses. He knew too that the Law had confined the Jewish priesthood to one particular tribe; yet when the Levites emigrated into Judah, after the separation, he made priests of any who would. In spite of the clear instructions of the Law, he changed the divinely appointed date of the Feast of Tabernacles; and finally made himself the spiritual chief of the ten tribes, and in that capacity professed to offer a public sacrifice of inauguration in the new sanctuary at Bethel.

It was a high day at Bethel when the scene described in this afternoon's lesson took place. The king, Jeroboam, arrayed in royal state, was standing at the altar to offer incense. The multitude was looking on in silence at an act which meant the inauguration of a new religion, when the prophet from Judah rushed forward. In burning words he foretold the birth of a prince of the house of David, who would slay upon this altar the very priests that burnt the incense: the altar, he said, would be defiled by human bones.[1] Just as Isaiah named Cyrus,[2] the deliverer of his country, four centuries before his birth, so more than three centuries before his date, this nameless prophet foretells the name and work of Josiah—as the predestined destroyer of the false religion invented by Jeroboam. As a miraculous sign that his words would prove true, the prophet further announced that the altar would be rent and the ashes upon it scattered. Without waiting to see whether the sign was fulfilled, Jeroboam stretched out his hand to lay hold on the prophet, accompanying the action with an order for his arrest. But the king's hand stiffened miraculously, and at the same moment the altar was shattered and the ashes poured out. Jeroboam was crushed by the double miracle. He entreated the prophet to pray for his restoration. His prayer was granted. But the new worship at Bethel and Dan was publicly and fatally discredited. God, it was seen, was against its promoters; it was destined, the people knew, to perish.

Here, then, we see the greatness of the mission with which the prophet of Judah was intrusted. He was to Jeroboam what Samuel was to Saul after the victory over Amalek;—he announced God's displeasure at the most critical moment of his life, when uninterrupted success was crowned by high-handed rebellion against the gracious

[1] 1 Kings xiii. 2. [2] Isa. xliv. 28; xlv. 1-4.

Being Who had done everything for the rebel. Jeroboam had a Divine warrant for political separation from Judah: but he had no warrant whatever, except that it seemed to him politically expedient, to found a new religion. The prophet placed the king under the ban of God; but he also uttered the condemnation of the new religion. Not in the streets of Jerusalem, or in the deserts along the Dead Sea coast, where he would have been safe out of harm's way, but at Bethel, the sanctuary of the new creed, face to face with its originator, who was surrounded by his court and soldiery, did this messenger of God utter his ban. It was a service of the utmost danger; and a service of corresponding honour. He went to Bethel with his life in his hand, under the stress of an overmastering conviction; and the sentence which he pronounced withered up the system which was bursting into life, and had its effect—its lasting, awful effect—on the whole history of Israel down to the Captivity.

The prophet of Judah, then, although nameless, was, historically speaking, a great man. He had one great duty to do, a duty which demanded heroic resolution,—and he did it. But our public official life may be one thing; our personal spiritual life, quite another. A man is not saved from temptations because he plays a great part in the Church or in the world; and public success is, alas! no guarantee against private individual irrecoverable failure.

II.

And here we reach the second point—the temptations to which the Jewish prophet was exposed in the discharge of his high and awful mission.

The prophet had been bidden by the very Inspiration which sent him on his errand, to eat no bread and drink

no water in the land of Israel, nor to return into Judah by the way along which he came. Bethel was not far from the frontier, so that this command might easily have been obeyed. What was the object of the command? Eating and drinking together has, in all ages, in all stages of civilisation, been considered a token of good-fellowship; and the true worshippers of God were no longer able to hold fellowship with the men of Bethel, who were in Jewish eyes idolaters and excommunicate. And the prophet was to return a different way, in order to avoid the emissaries of Jeroboam, who might bring him back and tempt him to some compromise, unworthy of the honour of God, and fatal to the complete success of his mission.

The first temptation to disobey this command came from Jeroboam himself. Jeroboam had found that, king though he was, he could not crush the man of God by his power. Could he win him over by social attentions? Could he render the awful message of which the prophet was the bearer, less serious in the eyes of the people by making public show of being on good terms with the bearer? It was not to honour the prophet, or to express his thankfulness for the restoration of his hand, that Jeroboam invited him to his palace to refresh himself with food, and to give him a present. Jeroboam merely illustrates the law of opposition to the work of God in all ages. The world's maxim is, Put it down by force if you can: and if that fails, be civil to it; teach it to feel at home with you; take it into your pay; corrupt it.

So it has been again and again in the history of Christendom. Men who in humble life have been great agents in promoting moral and spiritual improvements, have got on in the world, been promoted, and have lost their power. Why is this? Was it not that the world, which quailed before their early, simple, fearless faith, has

succeeded in enticing them to its palace, and in making them eat the bread and drink the water of good-fellowship with itself? They have given it pledges; and they cannot, if they would, be as they were. They cannot always draw back when they would: the world holds them to the admissions which they have made in its favour; and when they find that resistance is ineffectual, they give it up, and drift with the tide of events, and end sometimes as the champions and apologists of what they were sent to rebuke. When a Church historian, speaking of a particular period, says that the Apostolical temper was conspicuously wanting in the higher places of the Church, the explanation is that the Jeroboams of the time had succeeded: and that the prophets of the Most High, having on their lips a message to rebuke the world and predict its ruin, had ended by making common cause with it. And something of the same kind took place with Christendom as a whole after the conversion of Constantine, when heathendom, finding itself no longer strong enough to crush the Church, endeavoured, in some respects not without success, to make it eat bread and drink water in its Bethel.

Yet it was not difficult for a man like the prophet of Judah to decline Jeroboam's invitation. It cannot have said much to his inclinations; it cannot for a moment have embarrassed his conscience. Jeroboam's entreaty for the prophet's prayers only expressed his fears, not his repentance. His wish that the prophet should accept his hospitality was plainly at issue with God's command: and a suggestion to disobey coming from the headquarters of disobedience and rebellion was easily dismissed. "If," said the prophet, "thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread and drink water in this place."[1]

[1] 1 Kings xiii. 8.

A more serious temptation followed, and with a different result. The prophet of Judah had taken his homeward road, when an old prophet, who lived at Bethel, was told by his sons of what had happened to the king of Israel at the inauguration festival of the new religion. The old prophet determined to endeavour to bring him back. He rode after the prophet of Judah, and found him sitting—no doubt wearied by his exertions and by his long fast—under a terebinth tree. The old prophet, having ascertained that this was the prophet of Judah, asked him to return with him. The prophet of Judah at first refused, on the ground which he had pleaded to Jeroboam: God had forbidden it. The old prophet saw that in order to conquer this resolution he must have recourse to fraud. "He said unto him, I am a prophet also as thou art; and an angel spake unto me by the word of the Lord, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water. But," says the sacred historian, "he lied unto him."[1]

What was this old prophet? Was he a false prophet or a true? A true prophet seeking his own personal edification in an interview with one who manifestly had such power with God, or a false prophet, endeavouring to tempt the prophet of Judah to an act of disobedience which might ruin him? The probable answer to this question would seem to be that the old prophet of Bethel was a true prophet, in that he really had the prophetic gift, but that he was not a good man. Like Balaam, he had heavenly endowments, yet, personally, he was not a man of principle. He was a religious adventurer, who had a divine commission and supernatural gifts, yet who placed them at the service of the world, of Jeroboam. The distinction between official title, or even great personal endowments and accomplishments, and personal

[1] 1 Kings xiii. 18.

character, is plain enough. Many bishops and clergymen have ministered in the Church of Christ, with full, undisputed authority, with, it may be, conspicuous ability, yet without personal spiritual character. It is, of course, miserable work, for themselves and for their people; but God's gifts, whether of authority or of genius, do not necessarily accompany high moral worth. Judas was an apostle, though he betrayed his Master: and the old prophet was not less a prophet because he had given himself to the service of Jeroboam.

Why should the old prophet have wished to bring the prophet of Judah back? Probably the motive was a mixed one. He wished to see a remarkable person who had just now made a stir in the world; but this was not the only or the deepest motive. He had made a false move himself, and perhaps, half unconsciously to himself, he was uneasy at the idea of a brother-prophet who could take a line so much higher and more heroic than his own. He would, if he could, bring him down to his own level: at any rate he would put this high mettle to the proof. And perhaps, behind this, there was a feeling that if he succeeded, he would stand very well with the king of Israel, who could have no objection to witness the moral humiliation and punishment of a man who had so signally discomfited his own favourite scheme for governing Israel by manufacturing for it a new religion.

Where the king had failed, the old prophet succeeded. His garb, as the prophetic dress is afterwards described by Zechariah, marked his office;[1] his white hairs spoke of the added authority of age. "A hoary head," says Solomon, "is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness."[2] There is no walk in life, even the most sacred, to which hoar hairs do not add a lustre and weight. To be old is to have been tried, to have had varied experiences,

[1] Zech. xiii. 4. [2] Prov. xvi. 31.

to have passed through vast tracks of thought and feeling; to have learnt something of the necessity, perhaps of the majesty, of patience;—much of life's actual weakness, pettiness, failures, insignificance; much of its possibilities for greatness. To be old is so far to have approximated—at however immeasurable an interval,—towards the Eternal Years of God: the fundamental idea of reverence for antiquity, whether in institutions or in men, lies in the sense of this distant likeness to the Uncreated and Everlasting. And therefore, wherever man has had the instinct of his true dignity among the creatures, old age has been held in honour, and has been credited readily with high and commanding authority—an authority which, for thoughtful and generous minds, is all its own. But of all the sad spectacles in the moral world, one of the saddest is seen when age abuses its high prerogatives: when the love and trust and veneration which it invites is only accepted and used to mislead or chill those who give it. And this spectacle, alas! is seen not unfrequently. The old prophet of Bethel is not dead: and shivering on the brink of his grave, from generation to generation, he cannot bear to see a younger race undertaking duties from which he has shrunk. Who has not heard of young men with noble, although uninformed conceptions of duty and honour, going to ask some aged friend or relative if it were not possible to realise them, and meeting with a shrug of the shoulders and a cynical smile: "Young man, when you have lived as long as I have, and have come to know something about the world as it is, you will find out that these high-flown ideas are but the dreams of youth, and that the true secret of life is to do what you can for yourself, in any way that you can do it, and leave other people and concerns to take care of themselves"? Who has not heard of young clergymen, impressed deeply with the seriousness and reality of their office,—with the boundless-

ness of our Divine Redeemer's Love, with the reality of His work upon souls, by His Spirit, and in His Church, and anxious above everything to do their duty, not grudgingly but with all their hearts,—going to some old incumbent whose life and work have been a gigantic failure to do spiritual good to any human being, and being told that all this activity was unnecessary and mischievous,—that the old way of doing as little as you could, with as little cost to yourself as you could, was the sensible and really religious course for a clergyman; that increased Services, increased Communions, increased care for souls, increased reverence in all that touches God's service, are unnecessary, if not unspiritual, or signs of a party; that the true object is to get on quietly, with as little disturbance of accustomed routine as possible? Others eat bread and water at Bethel, why should you be singular? And in some cases this has been listened to, and men who might have been eminent and devoted servants of Christ have been chilled to the heart by the words of one whose experience they trusted at the very outset of their career. No, certainly! we have not to look very far or to listen very long, in order to discover that the old prophet of Bethel is anything but dead.

Ay! and if he cannot carry his point in any other way, he will still plead overpowering religious motives; an angel, he will say boldly, has spoken to him too by the Word of the Lord. While his conscience tells him that it is a lie, he will invoke the sanction of Heaven, against Heaven's best and purest inspirations: he will talk about a religion which, if it is notoriously slovenly and unproductive, is spiritual, forsooth, in proportion to its barrenness and its sloth; a religion which combines the highest satisfactions of conscience with the entire indulgence of personal inclination or ambition! "I am a prophet also as thou art; and an angel spake unto me by the Word of the Lord,

saying, Bring him back with thee into thy house, that he may eat bread and drink water." Many a man who would withstand Jeroboam to the death quails before the confident imposture of the old prophet; before this solemn appeal to God against the obligation of God's own guidance and commands; before this invocation of the Eternal Justice to patronise a laxity and self-seeking which He has already condemned. So it was with the prophet of Judah: he would have died again and again rather than close with the offers of Jeroboam: he looked at the sacred garb and the white hairs of the old prophet of Bethel; he listened to that false appeal to his own Lord and Master —and he fell.

Do I say that young men are never guilty of extravagant enthusiasms, and that old men are not bound to set them right? Far from it. But it is one thing to pour cold water on a noble and burning impulse: another to give it a right direction.

The misery is when old age, forgetful of its lofty mission, exerts its authority to stint, cramp, stiffen, all the higher aspirations of young life; to teach young men that enthusiasm is folly, and high views of duty a morbid state of conscience which will be outlived. It may succeed—old age, at the moment,—but success, be sure, will cost it an everlasting heartache.

III.

The thing was done. The prophet of Judah returned, and they were seated at the table of the old prophet of Bethel over the feast of disobedience. And then, by a solemn and terrible irony, the seducer had to pass solemn judgment upon his victim. Prophet as he was, he could not resist the Spirit Which forced him to speak. "And it came to pass as they sat at the table, that the word of the

Lord came unto the prophet that brought him back: and he cried unto the man of God that came from Judah, saying, Thus saith the Lord, Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the Lord, and hast not kept the commandment which the Lord thy God commanded thee, but camest back, and hast eaten bread, and drunk water in the place, of which the Lord did say unto thee, Eat no bread, and drink no water; thy carcase shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers." What a commentary on those energetic words of the Psalmist: "He doth ravish the poor, when he getteth him into his net."[1] Yes! the world does not really, in the long-run, respect those who obey it: it has a bad conscience at bottom; it knows that it has no right to dictate on questions of Christian duty or Christian truth; and in its heart of hearts it despises—it even pities—those who believe it. When all is over, it tells them that they were mistaken after all; it dwells with poetic sentiment over the circumstances of their ruin. The carcase cast in the way, the ass standing by it, the lion also standing by the carcase, to illustrate the severity and the reserve of a Divine Judgment—these things touch its sentiment and its imagination. It drops a tear over the grave of its victims: it would fain be buried near their bones.[2] But poetry and feeling are not duty and action: it is too late, when we have ruined a soul, to unsay the sophism which seduced it, and to shed tears over a career which under other guidance might have escaped the lion in the way.

It may be thought that considering the old prophet's appeal to an angelic vision, the responsibility of the prophet of Judah was not so great after all; that he was rather sinned against than sinning; that his punishment was out of proportion to his offence, which was that of a ready credulity rather than of deliberate disobedience.

[1] Ps. x. 10.

[2] 1 Kings xiii. 24-31.

Brethren, I do not deny that the responsibility for the prophet's act was distributed: that the guilt of the old prophet of Bethel was as serious as it well could be; and if the sterner penalty here was paid by the prophet who disobeyed, and not by the prophet who tempted to disobedience, this is what we see every day of our lives. The victims of false teaching too often suffer, while, so far as this world is concerned, the false teachers escape; and conscience, witnessing this and other like mysteries of the Divine Government, utters its irrepressible, its ceaseless appeal to a Hereafter, when the strange inequalities of God's awards here shall be redressed. But the prophet of Judah was guilty too—guilty as they only can be guilty who have had great graces, clear and strong views of truth and duty, and high commissions intrusted to them, and have yielded to some temptation to abuse their trust. He knew what God had said to him: he knew that God had said it; that God could not contradict Himself. Unless there had been some subtle warp, some secret sympathy with what was wrong, he would have rejected the old prophet as he rejected Jeroboam. Age and office have their weight, their grave and indisputable weight, but they can never make the true to be false, or the right to be wrong for a clear healthy conscience. When age or office abuses its prerogatives, conscience meets them with the words of the Apostles, "We ought to obey God rather than men."[1]

The lesson which we learn from this history is one of the most important that a man can master. It is that, however high, however lowly, may be our place in society, or in the Church of Christ, our first duty is fidelity to God's voice in conscience. No eminence of position or accomplishments will atone for the absence of this; no insignificance in the world's eye will dim its spiritual

[1] Acts v. 29.

lustre. The pivot upon which all turns may seem to outward eyes trivial enough: the apple in Paradise, viewed as an apple, seemed a triviality upon which to hang the destiny of a world. But behind some given duty, which conscience acknowledges as duty—be it serious observance of the Lord's Day, or habits of prayer, or regular reception of the Holy Communion, or conscientious use of money, or services to relations or to the poor, or some small but needful point of self-denial—behind this single point there may lurk the whole question of the soul's loyalty to known truth.

What could be more petty than the circumstance of eating bread and drinking water at Bethel—to all appearance? Yet in reality everything depended on it; because it was not the outward transaction, but the inward principle which that transaction represented that was really at stake. In reality the mere circumstance of eating or not eating bread in a given place constituted the frontier between two different moral and spiritual worlds—between the kingdom of faithfulness to light and grace, and the kingdom of disobedience. May God enable us to see things—not simply on the surface, but as they really are; to measure them, not by a material but by a spiritual and moral standard; to understand that great issues may depend on insignificant circumstances; and to determine that if we can achieve it by His grace, we will be true to what He has taught us of truth and duty, cost what it may!

SERMON XIII.

ELIJAH ON HOREB.

1 KINGS xix. 13.

And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?

IT has been more than once observed that some of the men who, as we say, leave the greatest mark upon their age, are often liable to great changes of spirits, alternating between buoyant enthusiasm and something like despair. At first sight it seems as if the resources of human nature are after all very limited: that which is expended in one quarter must be withdrawn from another. The waves which raise their crests so proudly above the accustomed level of the ocean, imply, as we know, each one of them, corresponding intervals of depression: as the Psalmist says, in bold hyperbole—"as high as the hills, and down to the valleys beneath"[1]—of the rude experience of his exiled countrymen in the Phœnician waters. And so it is often with the life of men, especially of public men. The great effort which rivets the attention of the world, and which perhaps gives an impression of extraordinary strength or capacity, is often dearly purchased by succeeding hours of depression and weakness. Something of this kind was the case with the late Bishop Wilberforce: the buoyant spirits, the generous enthusiasm which made

[1] Ps. civ. 8.

him what he was in the Senate, in the pulpit, at public meetings, was dearly paid for by intervening periods of great despondency, when all things seemed dark, and nothing possible, and when he was perhaps less equal to the demands of duty than very inferior men.

From this characteristic of enthusiastic natures the mighty prophet who is before us in all the three first lessons of to-day [1] was not by any means exempt. So great was his power, both over men and nature, that in after ages his countrymen came to regard him as an altogether preterhuman personage, whose conduct was not a precedent for or a sample of that of ordinary men. In later times this idea of Elijah was enhanced by Malachi's prophecy about his coming before the great and terrible day of the Lord; [2] so that when St. John the Baptist appeared, it was a common opinion that "this was Elias, which was for to come." [3] When, then, St. James quotes Elijah as an example of the efficacy of prayer, he prefaces his argument by what might seem to us, before consideration, a very obvious and trite remark, but which was by no means unneeded for St. James's first readers. He says that "Elias was a man of like passions as we are." [4] Elijah had his share of impulse and of weakness; and therefore the power of his prayers is an encouragement for others than himself. Now, that Elijah was what St. James says of him, is plain from the lesson before us this afternoon. This morning [5] Elijah was on Carmel, at the height of his moral ascendency, of his supernatural force. True, since his first message from God to Ahab, he had been a fugitive. He had been fed by the ravens in the torrent-bed of the Cherith. He had been dependent on the charity

[1] The Eleventh Sunday after Trinity.
[2] Mal. iii. 1, 2.
[3] St. Matt. xi. 14.
[4] St. James v. 17.
[5] Cf. the First Lesson for the Morning Service of the Eleventh Sunday after Trinity.

of the devout Israelitish widow in the heathen town of Zarephath. But no sooner does he return to the soil of Israel than he asserts his astonishing power over all who come in contact with him, as if he too had, in his measure, a share of that promise to the Messiah: "Be thou ruler even in the midst among thine enemies."[1] Obadiah, Ahab's trusted minister, falls awe-struck before him. Ahab himself, who has spared no pains to compass his death, acts as a man under a resistless spell; and submissively, though with evident reluctance, carries out his orders. At his bidding the eight hundred and fifty prophets of the newly imported Nature-worship of the Phœnicians are marshalled upon Carmel; and he confronts them in his solitary weakness, in his solitary strength. Then follows the appeal to the people to choose between Baal and the One True God; the challenge to the prophets of Baal; their long but fruitless pleadings, prolonged from the early morning till the evening sacrifice, that Baal would own their offering,—pleadings accompanied by frantic self-mutilation, and redoubled as they listened to Elijah's terrible irony; and then, after their final failure, Elijah's measured preparations in accordance with the forgotten prescriptions of the ancient ritual; his solemn invocation of the God of Israel; the fire from heaven; the adoring confession of the people, "The Lord He is the God: the Lord He is the God;" the extermination of the idolaters. There is no other scene like it in the Bible, taken altogether. Elijah on Carmel represents man's moral ascendency over his brother men, in the name, and for the glory of a religious truth, carried to its highest point of effective power.

This afternoon[2] the scene has changed: Elijah is not on

[1] Ps. cx. 2.

[2] Cf. the First Lesson for the Evening Service of the Eleventh Sunday after Trinity.

Carmel, but on Horeb. The idolatrous priesthood was exterminated, but Jezebel remained. She had her projects and her means of vengeance: and the prophet who had triumphed when confronted by the king, the court, the people, the whole hierarchy of the false religion, must escape, if he would save his life from the implacable fanaticism of the queen. He first fled to Beersheba, far away to the south beyond the frontiers of Israel—a town of Judah indeed, but on the very confines of the wilderness. He left the boy who waited on him in the town—veiling, as we all do, his moments of extreme depression even from those who knew him best,—and then wandered out despairingly into the desert, and prayed that he might die. There he was braced for his journey by food, which was brought him by no human friend,—a type, it was thought by the Christian Church of the first ages, of that "strengthening and refreshing of our souls by the Body and Blood of Christ,"[1] which enables the Christian pilgrim to cross life's desert on his way to his true home.

Still in deep depression, after a journey of forty days, Elijah reached the Sacred Mountain, the scene of the great Revelation to Moses. Its hallowed associations, its awful solitudes, were in keeping with his thoughts: he entered into a cave or grotto, which was associated, it is likely, by local tradition with the name and work of Moses, and he gave himself up to the thoughts which crowded on his mind. Why had he succeeded so well only that success should issue, as it seemed, in failure? Why had such strength as had been vouchsafed him been followed by such weakness? Was not everything forfeited for which he had struggled? Was not his ministry closing in discomfiture and shame, while the insolent and idolatrous queen and her weak and wicked husband were completing the ruin of the religion of Israel? What was

[1] Cf. the Church Catechism.

the use of attempting anything further? All was really lost; and those who, like himself, had given their all to the losing cause, had only to bury what might remain of life in sadness and obscurity. These, or such as these, were his thoughts, when, solemnly, and twice over, the searching question came to him, "What doest thou here, Elijah?"

I.

Observe here, first, how God discovers Himself to Elijah. The Word of the Lord came to him, and He said unto him, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" "The Word of the Lord," the Word which was lodged in Elijah, of which he was the organ or instrument, and which he had proclaimed so vividly, so terribly, to others, now turned its voice—I had almost said its eye—in upon himself. This word or message which the prophet bears is, we thus see, not his servant but his master; it is not a work of his own mind which he may control, manipulate, silence at pleasure; it is a truth which, if it is in him, is yet independent of him; and to it he himself owes an obedience no less than does the humblest of his hearers. The prophet of old, the minister of Christ at the present day, is always the servant of the truth which he proclaims; and he utters it for his own reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness,[1] not less than for that of his people. To the question, "What doest thou here?" Elijah could not but reply. It was, so it seemed to the prophet, his zeal for the cause of God, his despair, his isolation, his sense of impotence and failure, which had brought him to Horeb. "I have been very jealous," he said, "for the Lord God of Hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and killed Thy

[1] 2 Tim. iii. 16.

prophets with the sword: and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away."[1]

This answer is neither accepted nor rejected; it is passed by without a word of approval or rebuke. If the prophet would know more he must leave the grotto and stand forth on the mountain side face to face with the Lord Jehovah. And then, as centuries before on this very spot with Moses, the "Lord passed by."[2]

The Author of Nature, Who also is the Lord of conscience, often speaks to conscience through the changing aspects of Nature; and thus Nature is a book, written in characters which those who live in communion with God know how to read. For them the wind, the earthquake, the lightning are not merely physical phenomena,—no forces or effects of which they can or cannot, as the case may be, furnish themselves with an adequate account; they are outward signs of invisible realities that belong to the human and moral world. Nature is a robe of beauty distinct indeed from the Creator Himself, since it is the work of His Hands, but luminous with revelations of His Ways and Will. What was "the great and strong wind" that "rent the mountains and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord,"[3] but a natural figure of the tempestuous impulse which had carried the prophet onwards ever since he left his native hills of Gilead? What "the earthquake," with its deep warning mutterings, with its violent shocks of upheaval and ruin crashing through the wild valleys around, but an image of convulsions of which the souls of Elijah and of many others, had been the scene? What the lightning, playing incessantly around him, but a reflection of the Heaven-sent burning zeal which had been the spirit of his work and life? And yet, as the wind, and the earthquake, and the fire succeeded each other, the prophet felt that they no longer meant for him

[1] 1 Kings xix. 10. [2] *Ib.* 11. [3] *Ib.*

what they would have meant as he stood on Carmel. They were signs of states of mind which once seemed instinct with the life of God, but which now, for the first time, he knew to be without it.

"The Lord was not in the wind." Strong religious impulse may be more than half physical,—a matter of temperament, of constitution. Earthly passion, in some natures, may take this form; the language, the intended and professed objects, may be of heaven, and the spirit of earth. Even though mountains of opposition are rent by it, and rocks of prejudice are broken in pieces, and changes are brought about which fill the thoughts of men and live in history, it may yet be that the agency which effects all this is in itself destitute of anything properly Divine: the "Lord was not in the wind."

"The Lord was not in the earthquake." Spasmodic terror may be only terror. The thought, or sight, or immediate apprehension of death, may convulse, to its very depths, the human soul; there must have been many such moments of intensified agony the other day in that dreadful scene in the Italian island.[1] But mere agitation may be only desperate; "the fear of the Lord," as distinct from the fear of anything else, "is the beginning of wisdom."[2] Whether the Lord is or is not in the great earthquakes of the soul depends, generally speaking, upon the soul's previous relations with Him.

"The Lord was not in the fire." He was in the burning bush: He was in the fiery tongues of Pentecost; but not in the fire which played around Elijah on Horeb. Religious passion carried to the highest point of enthusiasm is a great agency in human life: but it may be too inconsiderate, too truculent, too entirely lacking in tenderness and charity, to be in any sense Divine. Christendom has been the scene of the most Divine enthusiasm of which

[1] Ischia: Earthquake of Saturday, July 28, 1883. [2] Prov. i. 7.

the soul of man has ever had experience; but it has also been ablaze with fires (and they are not altogether extinct in our day and country) of which it may certainly be said that the Lord is not in them.

"And after the fire a still small voice." In physical impulse, in convulsive terror, in the white heat of emotions dealing with sacred things, we may seek for God in vain. But when conscience speaks clearly we may be sure of His presence. Conscience is His inward messenger, and in its quiet whisper we listen to an echo from the Infinite and the Unseen. We may, alas! play tricks with it, deny it, corrupt it, silence it; but if we will let it alone, reverence it, and listen to it, we are surely in the presence of God. "After the fire, a still small voice."

II.

Conscience then repeated the question, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" The question implied beyond all doubt that Elijah had better have been elsewhere, and that the state of mind which had brought him to Horeb was not altogether right or healthy. Elijah was still in deep gloom; he had yielded to it; and now he heard within him the voice of self-reproach, "What doest thou here, Elijah?"

Let us observe the character of Elijah's despondency. Its motive was unselfish and noble. It is true that he complains: "they seek my life to take it away." But he is here only thinking of himself as the representative of a sacred cause; he is not speaking in his personal or private capacity. As a man, he would, if it might be, gladly die: "Now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers."[1] So he had prayed in the wilderness of Beersheba. As a prophet, he desired to live for the sake of the truth which he had at heart: he felt that the sword

[1] 1 Kings xix. 4.

which would strike him was really aimed at that which for the moment he represented. The forsaken covenant, the ruined altars, the slaughtered prophets—these filled his mind and heart: they explained why it was that he was now far from the frontiers of Israel, a fugitive in the mountain sanctuary of Horeb.

Such a despondency as this is surely a much better thing than a jaunty light-heartedness which is at bottom based on a selfish indifference to the greatest things in life. It augurs ill for a State when its citizens are satisfied with their individual prosperity, and have no eye or care for the public weal. It augurs ill for a Church when men talk of a "personal religion" as if there was no thought, or care, or prayer, due to the great society of Christians united with our Lord—to what St. Paul calls the Body of Christ.[1] Prophecy has a stern word for those who are not "grieved at the affliction of Joseph."[2] History condemns the royal Sybarite who calculated that the world would last his time, and then added, "After me the deluge."[3]

The motive of Elijah's despondency was noble: but in itself his despondency was wrong. He might have remembered that what passes for the moment on earth is no measure of what is determined on in heaven. He might have reflected that while duties are ours, events are in the Hands of God. He might have associated himself with those lines of David, already ancient, written we know with little less than certainty, when the first mutterings of Absalom's rebellion were being heard, and when the faint-hearted men around him counselled flight:

> "In the Lord put I my trust:
> How say ye then to my soul, that she should flee as a bird
> unto the hill?
> For lo, the ungodly bend their bow,
> And make ready their arrows within the quiver:
> That they may privily shoot at him that is true of heart.

[1] 1 Cor. xii. 12, 27. [2] Amos vi. 6. [3] Louis XV.

For the foundations will be cast down:
And what hath the righteous done?
The Lord is in His holy temple:
The Lord's seat is in heaven." [1]

Had this been Elijah's mind he would still have been somewhere near Jezreel: as it was, he had failed for the moment, great prophet as he was, to set God's Will so clearly before Him as to keep close to the work which was given him to do. For the moment, even Elijah had done what we all are tempted from time to time to do: he had set aside the claim of duty in favour of the indulgence of sentiment; and because this sentiment was strictly religious sentiment, gathering round a great and ancient sanctuary, he had disguised from himself the fact that he had erred and strayed so far from the ways of God, and therefore the question flashed upon his conscience, like the lightning on the path of a benighted wanderer among the precipices: "What doest thou here, Elijah?"

III.

"What doest thou here?" Elijah, we have seen, had his own account to give of his being where he was; but behind his excuses, as they died away into space, there was the voice of duty. And the Lord said unto him, "Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus; and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria; and Jehu, the son of Nimshi, shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat, of Abel-meholah, shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room." [2]

These directions, whispered to Elijah's conscience by the "still small voice," involved two principles.

Elijah was not to dwell on the abstract aspects of evil: he was to address himself to the practical duties that lay

[1] Ps. xi. 1-4. [2] 1 Kings xix. 15, 16.

within his reach. Evil in its vast, massive accumulations —evil in its widespread and ancient empire—evil in the strong and subtle ascendency which from time to time it acquires among men—is beyond us. We in our weakness cannot banish it from the world; we lose precious time if we try to weigh and measure it: our truest wisdom is to pray to be delivered from it. There it is, a vast and terrible fact; permitted for reasons which we guess at rather than decipher. If the Children of Israel had broken the Covenant, destroyed the altars, and slain the prophets of the land,—this was now a fact, a permitted fact, and so far beyond Elijah's control. We only weaken ourselves by dwelling on mischiefs which we cannot hope to remedy. We have only a certain amount of thought, feeling, resolve to dispose of; and when this is expended unavailingly on the abstract and the intangible, it is expended, and we cannot employ it when we need it elsewhere and close at home.

And, secondly, Elijah was to begin with individuals—to deal with men, one by one. Anoint Hazael,—the heathen monarch who yet has a place in the Divine government of the world: that duty lies on the furthest frontier of thy work. Anoint Jehu: he will execute the impending judgments on the apostate king of Israel; that piece of work lies even nearer to thy appointed sphere of labour. Above all, provide for the continuance of thy ministry when thou shalt have gone hence; make Elisha the son of Shaphat prophet in thy room. That should be thy first concern, thy most sacred and imperative duty.

One of the familiar fallacies of an age like ours is the notion that men can really be improved—in the deepest sense of the word—if they are dealt with in masses. General legislation, the vague influence of oratory or of the press, social movements, which deal with men in the block and ignore the case and needs of indi-

viduals—these are common enough. This fallacy is a creation partly of the characteristic opportunities of the modern world, partly of the inertness which shrinks from the humbler and harder work of dealing with single characters. These general measures have, no doubt, their value—sometimes their great value—as supplementary influences, but they are almost worthless as substitutes for that careful labour with single souls which alone secures real changes in the heart and character. A proclamation in general terms would have had little effect upon Israel: the anointing Jehu, and the appointment of Elisha, were to be pregnant with consequences.

IV.

"What doest thou here?" To every human being in his most serious moments this question must be suggested. Why am I where I am, doing what I do, thinking what I think, saying what I say? What is the motive that shapes and guides my life, making me do this rather than that, take this turn in life rather than the other, make these friends, throw myself into these interests, these trains of thought, these associations, these enterprises? Something—perhaps much—may be determined by antecedent circumstances, that is, by the Hand of God acting through events, and so far suspending or limiting personal liberty. But beyond this there is a margin in which we all are free. Even those who cannot in the least control their personal movements, since they are, for whatever reasons, dependent upon others, can entirely determine where they will be, and what they will be doing, in the sphere of thought and purpose. We are all of us masters, if we will, of that inner world which we carry about within us; and it has its Carmel and its Horeb, no less than the outer world around us.

And the serious question for every man is whether, so far as he can judge, he is, according to his measure of strength and opportunity, endeavouring to do that little portion of the Will of God to which the circumstances which surround him, the powers and opportunities which have been given him, clearly point as meant for him, and for no other man, to do.

What it is exactly that engages each one of us matters little, if the motive to be doing God's Will is actively recognised. It may be the most important duties in Church or State; it may be the daily toil of a shop-boy or a domestic servant—all is equally ennobled if the great motive be there, all is equally degraded if it be absent. "What would you do," a very good man was once asked who was playing draughts with his little boy, "if you knew that you would die in five minutes?" "Finish this game," was the reply. Work and recreation are equally legitimate, if each is treated as a part of the Will of God; if, throughout life, its awful significance as the great gift for which we must surely account to our Maker, and which has been purchased from ruin by the Incarnation and Death of our Divine Redeemer, be steadily kept in view. There may be very good reasons for spending portions of it on Horeb as well as on Carmel; but the essential point is that we should be where we are, and be doing what we do, because, so far as we know, He Who has given us the gift of life wills this, and nothing else, respecting us.

SERMON XIV.

THE LAW OF INFLUENCE.

1 KINGS XIX. 19-21.

So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him. And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again: for what have I done to thee? And he returned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat: then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him.

HERE we see one of the ways in which the prophetical ministry was propagated and maintained in Israel. It was not, like the Jewish priesthood, a matter of hereditary descent: the son did not become a prophet because his father was one before him. Like Jeremiah, each prophet was the subject of a special predestination to his work: "Before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations."[1] But each prophet was called to his work by some especial token or influence; and either as a student in one of the colleges or schools of the prophets, or as an attendant upon a great teacher, he received a kind of education for his future life. Elisha appears to have been a man of substance. He was ploughing in the field with twelve yoke of oxen at Abel-meholah, in the valley of the Jordan,

[1] Jer. i. 5.

when Elijah passed on his way back from the vision which had been granted him in Mount Horeb. Elijah does not seem to have spoken: he merely cast his mantle upon Elisha and passed on. This act was symbolical: it had, like many of the formal actions of the prophets, such as rending the dress, putting ashes on the head, and the like, an ascertained and recognised meaning. The prophet's mantle was a visible sign of the robe of spiritual power which encompassed him; and to cast it on another was to call him to share the labour and glory of the prophetical office. Although Elijah had not spoken, this significant action was perfectly understood, and Elisha obeyed its purpose. He ran after the silent prophet who was already vanishing from his sight. He had only one petition: he would take leave of his parents and receive their blessing, and then he would follow. Elijah assents: but Elisha must return soon, considering the greatness of the destiny before him. The original here should be rendered, "Go, return; for how great a thing have I done unto thee!" Elisha is bent upon showing the undivided allegiance which he owes to the prophet, the completeness of his self-surrender. Up to that moment his farm on the banks of the Jordan had been his all, as, in a later age, their boats and nets had been everything to the fishermen on the Sea of Galilee, who were predestined to the apostolate of the world. Elisha does not linger to drop regrets over this cherished past. He forthwith slays the oxen with which he had just been ploughing: he takes the plough-tackling for fuel, that he may boil their flesh; he gives one parting entertainment to his acquaintances and the neighbourhood, that they may have no doubt either of his goodwill towards themselves, or of his lofty resolution: and then he leaves the scene of his labours, his field, his home, his all, to become the servant of Elijah.

Is this, think you, to be looked upon as only and strictly an incident in the life of a prophet? has it no permanent, no wider application—no human significance? There is some risk, my brethren, of blinding ourselves to the real meaning of the Old Testament—of its urgent and striking appeals to the Christian conscience and life,—by saying that this and that is only Oriental, and has therefore no relevancy for a modern European. Certainly there is a superficial element of custom and ceremony in the life described in the Old Testament which does belong to the ancient East, and which is untransferable to the circumstances of our own day and country. But human nature on the one side, and the great laws of God's Providential dealings on the other, were in the East, two thousand eight hundred years ago, exactly what they are now: and what occurred then "was written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of" these ancient "Scriptures, might have hope,"[1] as well as other virtues which are to be won from the perusal.

The call of Elisha then has its place, not merely in the history of his order, or in the history of his country, but in that of humanity. And as such it must be regarded as an astonishing instance of the power of a religious influence. The silent prophet passes, and drops his mantle: and the life of another is agitated to its inmost depths; its whole current and direction is changed; he yields to an attraction which he does not analyse, but obeys. It may be well to ask ourselves in what—putting aside for to-day the great question of God's supernatural grace—did this influence, this attraction, consist? For it is not to be supposed that the obedience of Elisha had nothing to do with those motives and laws of conduct which govern the action of thoughtful and conscientious men. It is not to be supposed that Elijah put forth a

[1] Rom. xv. 4.

force which was literally magical—magical in such sense that it exerted upon Elisha's will an influence for which no account could be given in reason—a magnetic influence which could not but be obeyed. Had this been so, the interest of this history would have been shifted from the department of spiritual and moral life to the department of physics; and it would perhaps be more appropriately investigated in a lecture-room at St. Bartholomew's Hospital than in the pulpit of this Cathedral. No: mighty as was the influence of Elijah, Elisha's liberty was not destroyed by it; he was perfectly free to have resisted it. If he did not do so; if he yielded at once; if he decided instantaneously on an obedience which, as we may think, ought to have been preceded and justified by an exhaustive discussion; this was because there must have been a preparatory and educational process going on for some time within him; he must have had thoughts, convictions, aspirations, which only waited the occasion to be combined and expressed in action. And so, when the great prophet passed by, all the scattered reasons for being drawn to him coalesced into a single ray of moral light and heat which determined Elisha's course—which impelled him to an act of such unreserved obedience.

I.

It is, then, material to ask, what must have been, at least, some of the motives which would have thus led Elisha to obey?

1. First of all, Elijah would have represented in Elisha's eyes a great cause—a great and imperious idea or truth which had been lodged for centuries in the soul of every Israelite. That idea was the existence and claims of the One Living and True God Who had revealed Himself to Israel. While the surrounding nations were in differ-

ent degrees of heathen darkness and degradation, Israel, by a singular exercise of God's favour, had been chosen to know His Will, and in that knowledge to know much, although not all, that we Christians know of Himself,—of His Character, His Nature, His Attributes. To treasure that knowledge, to hand it on from generation to generation, to make it the inspiring principle of national and individual thought and life—this was the appointed task of the consecrated people, again and again prescribed in their law, again and again enforced by the exhortations of their prophets, again and again illustrated in the lives and works of their most representative saints and leaders.

In quiet times not merely every prophet, every member of the priesthood and Levitical tribe, but even every Israelite, represented this great truth. Every Israelite was admitted by circumcision into a covenant with God, which bound him to loyalty to God's earlier revelation of Himself: just as every baptized Christian in this Cathedral bears the sacred sign, as our Baptismal Service expresses it, "in token that hereafter he shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under His banner against sin, the world, and the devil; and to continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto his life's end."

In quiet times this representative duty of every believer in a Revelation towards the Revelation which he believes is accepted, at least in terms, without difficulty. It is only "when persecution or tribulation ariseth because of the Word that" certain classes of its adherents "are offended."[1] When Elijah appeared upon the scene it seemed as if the Revelation committed to Israel were on the point of being trodden out by a young and vigorous idolatry. The marriage of Ahab, king of Israel, with Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, prince of Sidon, had led to the propagation of

[1] St. Matt. xiii. 21.

the queen's religion—the worship of the Phœnician Baal—one of those seductive varieties of the worship of the vital powers of nature in a personified form, which exercised such sway over the ancient world, and which are not by any means, although in another and more refined guise, unwelcome to the modern one. So attractive was the superstition, so commanding the influence of the Court, so vigorous and trenchant the policy of the queen, that seven thousand was the total number of Israelites who had escaped the taint, who had not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.

At great trial-times like these, great causes become identified with individuals—truths are for the time impersonated in single men. Elijah was to the revelation of The One God, Maker of heaven and earth, what at a later age St. Paul was to the truth of man's justification through Christ's merits, without legal obedience; what St. Athanasius was, during the great Arian struggle, to the true Divinity of Jesus Christ, as it had been taught by the Apostles. When men looked on Elijah, moving rapidly from one scene of danger to another in those troublous times, the whole history of Israel, the whole Mosaic revelation, seemed to live and speak in him. Behind his individual voice and gesture there was the felt presence of a great cause, of a mighty truth; and, as a consequence, he exercised an influence, great, out of all proportion to his personal position. It was not the man himself, it was the Divine Cause, the Heaven-sent revelation which he represented, which won and enchained to him the hearts of those who still believed in it. Elisha bent before the truth, of which his master was himself the servant.

My brethren, the first condition of a deep religious influence is a clear, positive creed,—clear and positive, whether its area be large or small. A man must know what he does believe. Elijah would have been powerless

had he only insisted on the falsehood of the superstitions of Jezebel and her prophets. He would have been powerless had he merely surrounded the revelation of Sinai with a garniture of sentiment and poetry, leaving it doubtful whether he believed it to be God's very truth or not. He was powerful, because men knew that he had no doubt about his creed,—about its exact frontier, about its absolute certainty. Elisha, I say, felt the passage, not of a mere man, but of a mighty cause or truth represented in the man,—and he obeyed it.

2. But in representing a great cause, official representation is not enough for religious influence. Personal qualities are needed—qualities in harmony with the requirements of the cause or truth represented. Eli and his sons represented the Mosaic Revelation to Israel: but they made the Lord's people to transgress. Alexander VI. and Leo X. represented Christianity, in the official sense of the term, to Western Christendom: but they certainly did not recommend it to the consciences of men. The ordinary Hanoverian Bishops of a century ago were, by office, representatives of Christianity in the Church of England: but with a few splendid exceptions, their representation was strictly official and powerless, where it was not, as in Hoadley's case, utterly repulsive. In order to reach hearts and mould convictions, personal conformity to the ideal represented is needed, as well as an official right to represent. And Elijah would have been felt by Elisha to have this personal title to represent the cause of God, superadded to his official one. Every Israelite, we may be sure, whether friend or foe,—whether in open league with the apostate court at Jezreel, or in secret correspondence with the schools of the prophets,—had heard of the stern mien and lofty proportions of a character which seemed to belong to another world. They knew that, if anywhere, here was a perfect simplicity of purpose,

a determination to live and die for the glory of the God of the Patriarchs, Who had brought Israel out of Egypt, and Who had spoken on Sinai. They knew that here was an unflinching courage, which shrank not from encounter with the cruel and wily idolatress who ruled the policy of Israel. They must have been well assured that the ties of flesh and blood did not fetter Elijah's liberty: for, like John the Baptist nine centuries later, he had prepared for his ministry in the solitudes of the desert, and then had suddenly appeared, in the very palace of the weak and apostate monarch, to denounce his sins and to foretell the judgments which awaited him.

In an age of decaying faith, of moral deterioration, of general apostasy, Elijah stood forth from among the mass of men in almost solitary grandeur: he must have been felt to be the typical saint and hero of the old theocracy; he must have been recognised as embodying in the highest degree the moral power which belonged to a life, so shaped and led as to express before men's eyes his firm conviction of the truth of the Sinaitic revelation. True it was that Elijah too was, at times, subject even to deep discouragement. After his great victory over the assembled prophets of Baal upon Mount Carmel, it seemed for a moment that the tide of public feeling had turned: and men cried in their enthusiasm, "the Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is the God."[1] But the happy change was of short duration. The day of Carmel was forgotten, and Ahab was still Ahab: Jezebel had not ceased to be Jezebel: and the multitude, which for a moment had obeyed with fervour the authority of the prophet, soon fell back to the sanguinary and voluptuous rites of Baal with a new enthusiasm. And then Elijah felt that despondency of which great and ardent souls alone are capable. God seemed to be hiding His Face: the prophet's faith was

[1] 1 Kings xviii. 39.

almost slipping from him : the whole order of the moral world was for the moment confused, dark, incomprehensible, out of course. Jezebel was again in power: she menaces his life : and he, in truth, is weary of it,—weary of the apparently hopeless struggle which is its condition. He returns to the southern desert, in which he had learnt his earliest lessons; where he is well out of the way of the levity and frivolity of his apostate countrymen ; where he is face to face with the savage desolation of nature, in a scene that seems to correspond to the blank of his own inward misery. He fain would die. And when a voice from Above reaches his conscience in his retreat, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" he replies by a bitter complaint that God has abandoned His cause, and left His prophet to struggle alone, unbefriended, vanquished.[1]

Does this forfeit the prophet's influence? Is it fatal to the commanding greatness of his character? Certainly it had been a more perfect course to have trusted God throughout—to have trusted Him in failure, not less than amid success. But Elijah, great as he was, was not the All-Perfect : and his failure was itself one of those forms of failure which are only possible to high faith and devotion. They to whom life seems worthless because God's cause is imperilled or defeated for the time, are in all generations among the few. To the many, the whole question is of no great concern : whether the Church of Christ is winning her way among souls, or losing it; whether she is extending the frontiers of the Redeemer's Kingdom or barely maintaining them: whether her ministers are speaking boldly in the Name of Jesus, or pandering to popular unbelief. All this troubles them not; they eat, walk, and sleep as if all were well, as did their fathers in quiet days before them. The anguish, the discontent, the fierce desperation of Elijah, are the pro-

[1] 1 Kings xix. 9, 10.

ducts,—it may be the unregulated and disordered products,—of a noble passion whereof they know nothing: the noble and generous passion which is careful only for the honour of God, and which is uncontrollable when He seems to be defeated and disowned.

No; if Elisha knew of Elijah's retreat, in profound discouragement, almost in despair, to Horeb, he would not have been less open to the prophet's influence. The poignant despondency of a great faith may be almost its virtue. Elisha would have felt not the less drawn to the solitary of Horeb than to the conqueror of Carmel.

3. There is a third element of influence beyond: the influence which belongs to a soul often in communion with God. This is less easy to seize, to describe, to measure, than the weight which belongs to the representation of a great cause or truth, and to personal elevation of character. It cannot be mapped out in words or actions; it is nothing exactly tangible: it is an atmosphere which hovers around a life, and which we are conscious of breathing when we approach it. It is not a matter of manner, of gestures, of expressive words, or of expressive silence. It is not to be precipitated into any outward form; it is too volatile if you will, too strictly supersensuous, too altogether appertaining to the region of spirit to be registered by definite tests and marks in the sphere of matter. Yet who has not sometimes felt it—this indescribable influence, this sure certificate of nearness to God—which some few privileged souls of both sexes, and in all stations of society, all unconsciously to themselves, exert? It is something beyond character—it is tone. It is something beyond goodness—it is holiness. It needs no language to express it—it is felt instinctively. And Elisha may well have felt it as Elijah passed along the field of Abel-meholah.

II.

This history suggests two sets of considerations: one for those who exert religious influence of any kind; the other for those who yield to it.

(*a*) And, first, for those who exert it. All wise and thoughtful people may shrink from the great but unavoidable responsibility of doing so; the responsibility of saying, whether in words or by acts to others, "Follow me! Follow me upwards through this path or that, in the light of this creed or that, towards the Throne of Light."

Yet this is certain, that do what we will, we cannot but exert some influence: every man is the apostle of something, of evil, if not of good; our very presence is of itself a propagandism of some faith. Whether we will or not, we are leading others in some direction.

> "We scatter seeds with careless hand,
> And dream we ne'er shall see them more;
> But for a thousand years
> Their fruit appears,
> In weeds that mar the land,
> Or healthful store.
>
> The deeds we do, the words we say,
> Into still air they seem to fleet,
> We count them ever past;
> But they shall last,—
> In the dread judgment they
> And we shall meet!"[1]

It is better, then, to make a virtue of what is already a necessity: to wield a talent usefully of which we cannot disfranchise ourselves altogether if we would. Some of us are teachers: what is the influence we are exerting upon our pupils? Some of us are masters and mistresses: what influence do we bring to bear upon our servants? Some of us are parents: how are we influencing—in some

[1] *Lyra Innocentium*, iv. 1.

way we must be influencing—our children? "Ah!" we say, "we wish we could be of use in this way; but it is an affair of temperament. Some people understand it, others do not." No, brethren, the explanation is simpler, juster than this. If when Elijah casts his mantle upon Elisha—the mantle of his creed, of his conduct, of his life—Elisha does not respond, there may be another explanation of the failure than that which we are thinking of. Success is impossible if Elijah represents nothing clear and certain—if he does not know his own mind, if he is only trying to win acceptance for a few guesses or crotchets of his own, instead of for a creed which has come from Heaven. Success is improbable, again, if Elijah's life is quite out of keeping with his creed: if he is felt to be incapable of that which he recommends; if he has done and ventured nothing for the cause he advocates. It is improbable, too, if he has about him none of the air and bearing of an envoy of God: if he is obviously devoted to this world, and only alludes to the next in an official way, and without the accent of a man to whom it is a serious reality. Doubtless, God may make His truth do its own work in hearts in spite of the inconsistencies of His representatives. But I am speaking of what is probable: as a rule He works through instruments. Elisha is won by the decision, the consistency, the unearthliness of Elijah, as much as by the intrinsic claims of that which he represents.

(β) And there is instruction here for those who yield to religious influences. Some of us, I suppose, have known something like the passage of Elijah in our past lives. A religious influence has swept across our path, placing truth and duty more clearly before us than ever before, recommending them by an example of high-minded devotion, of simple and disinterested life. We have felt its power, but have we obeyed it?—it may be after a legitimate hesitation, such as Elisha's—but still have we obeyed it? Had

Elisha refused to acknowledge what was meant in the casting of Elijah's mantle, we know how vast would have been the difference to the kingdom of Israel, to the kingdom of Syria, to the Kingdom of God, to himself above all. He was no longer in the same moral position, after the Divine call to another life. He could no longer survey, if he would, the twelve yoke of oxen with a perfectly easy conscience, as if he had really no duty, no destiny, except that of ploughing the field in Abel-meholah. A spell from Heaven had crossed his path, and he must decide either to acknowledge or to ignore it. So it may be, or have been, with us.

The history of this afternoon's lesson will have recalled at least two passages in the Life of the Divine Redeemer: the call of the disciples,[1] and the call of the man who wished first to bury his father.[2] In our Lord's case, it is observable that the call to instant obedience is much more peremptory than in Elijah's. He commands, in terms, "Follow Me:" Elijah only suggests by a symbolic action. Our Lord allows of no delay, even to perform the last duties to a parent's memory: Elijah has no hesitation in allowing Elisha to take leave of his father and mother before entering on the prophetic life. This difference is to be explained by the intrinsic differences between the person of the prophet and the Redeemer. Elijah did but represent the cause of God: in Jesus "there dwelt the whole fulness of the Godhead bodily."[3] Elijah's conduct, although that of a saint and hero, was not absolutely perfect: in the life of Jesus no trace of shortcoming could possibly be detected. They who came near to Elijah came near to one who was irradiated by constant communion with God: they who came near to Jesus were, as the Seraphim around the Throne, close—whether they knew it or not—to the very

[1] St. Matt. iv. 18-21; St. John i. 43.
[2] St. Matt. viii. 19-22.
[3] Col. ii. 9.

Form which the All-Holy Himself had assumed in time. The greater urgency of our Lord is proportioned to His unspeakably higher and more imperative claim. And it is with Him that we have to do. Amid our most trivial duties, on days which are passing in the usual round of uneventful routine, Christ may speak to us, as never before. A quiet word is dropped by a friend,—a sentence is read in a book,—a thought lodges, we know not why, in the mind; and we are laid under obligations to a new and more imperious view of life and duty. Elijah's Lord passes and casts His mantle.

There is of course room for self-delusion of many kinds in the supposed visit of a heavenly call. We may read our own fancies in the skies, if we do not take care; we may transfigure our own wishes into Divine voices by a process so subtle as to impose upon ourselves. But we are tolerably safe if two conditions are observed:—If (1) the duty or line of life prescribed is unwelcome to our natural inclinations; and (2) if it does not contradict what God has taught us hitherto,—if it is an extension of His earlier teachings, not their condemnation. No one who believes that our Lord is still present within His Church can doubt that He will, from time to time, speak thus to souls in virtue of His own promises. No one who knows anything practically of the lives of earnest Christians will question the fact of His having done so. And to listen for the footsteps of the Divine Redeemer, passing by in the ordinary providences of life, is a most important part of our probation. How much may depend on following when He beckons us on to some higher duty or to some more perfect service, we shall only know when we see all things as they really are in the light of Eternity.

SERMON XV.

AHAB AT NABOTH'S VINEYARD.

1 Kings xxi. 20.

And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee; because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord.

NABOTH had been put to death; and King Ahab had gone down from Samaria to the bright and pleasant town of Jezreel, where he had a summer villa, in order to take possession of Naboth's vineyard.

There was Ahab, walking up and down the vineyard, and very well satisfied with his new acquisition. It had come to him by regular form of law, for its late owner had been convicted of treason, as well as of blasphemy: he and his sons[1] had been executed; and the property had been forfeited to the Crown. This forfeiture was not prescribed by any rule laid down in the Mosaic Law: it resulted from the principle involved in the idea of high treason. Just as, according to the formal prescriptions of the law of Deuteronomy,[2] the property of a blasphemer against God was consecrated to God, as a devoted thing, or, as the Hebrews called it, *cherem*; so in the case of a traitor to the king, the king succeeded to the property which the traitor had held. In the case of the double crime, a king like Ahab would be likely to plead the rights of the Crown. The vineyard therefore was legally King Ahab's, and he had determined to enjoy it. How

[1] 2 Kings ix. 26.

[2] Deut. xiii. 16.

admirable was the situation of the vineyard, especially for an occupant of the royal villa! The villa was on the eastern side of the town; it abutted on the town-wall; it commanded a view all down the fertile valley which stretched towards the Jordan. Immediately below the villa was the dry moat of the town; and then beyond the moat, at no great distance, this fertile plot of ground which had belonged to Naboth. King Ahab had long wished to have it; and now it had come to him after regular process of law. He would turn it into "a garden of herbs, because it was near to his house;"[1] a flower garden, no doubt, which might be reached from the villa by a small drawbridge; and, after a little consideration, he would be able to see how to lay it out to the best advantage.

These were Ahab's thoughts and occupations when Elijah the prophet suddenly appeared. The prophets filled a position in ancient Israel which may be described as that of an inspired public or national conscience. Over and above the great endowment which they all possessed, but in very various degrees, of foreseeing and foretelling the distant future in a manner impossible to merely rational or natural foresight, they had the right and duty of commenting in the plainest terms, and with the highest authority, on all passing events. Thus to take the instance which is suggested by the daily lessons read in church during the past week,[2] Jeremiah was the public conscience of Judah during the last years of the monarchy. Against the false patriotism which would have fallen back on Egypt, and have broken existing treaties with the Babylonian monarch, Jeremiah upheld, at the risk of his life (Urijah, we know, lost his life for upholding), an unpopular but stern truth, that the Jewish kings must abide by their engagements, and trust not in Egypt, but in God. And so now, in an earlier age, Elijah embodies the public

[1] 1 Kings xxi. 2.

[2] Cf. Jer. xxvi.-xxx.

conscience of the kingdom of Israel. What none else dared say, he said; and King Ahab, walking up and down his newly acquired vineyard, had good reasons for apprehending that he was not likely to be silent at this particular time.

Elijah appeared.

"Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" It implies, this cry of vexation and distress, that Elijah was, as we should say, in the air, and might be expected to appear. Ahab's conscience told him, in an undertone, that enough had happened to explain the appearance of Elijah. "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" Ahab could not think of any truthful adviser as a friend. Of Micaiah the son of Imlah, he said, at a later date, "I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil."[1] Ahab tries to persuade himself that whatever Elijah might say would be dictated, not by a sense of truth, but by a personal hostility. "Mine enemy." Elijah was the minister of truth, and Ahab had been endeavouring, as best he might, to do that which truth must implacably condemn,—to construct a false conscience. Naboth was dead; but between the true account of his death, and Ahab's thought about it, there were rising up already in Ahab's mind, three intercepting screens, which, Ahab felt, would not be tenderly treated by Elijah. It may be useful to consider what these screens were which hid from Ahab the naked and unwelcome truth.

I.

That which first of all blinded Ahab more or less to the true character and extent of his responsibility for the death of Naboth was the force of desire. A single desire, long dwelt upon, cherished, indulged, has a blinding power which cannot easily be exaggerated.

[1] 1 Kings xxii. 8.

Ahab had long looked wistfully, from his villa, across the moat of Jezreel, at the vineyard of Naboth. There it lay, beautiful in itself, and most desirable as an appendage to the royal property. Without it the summer villa was obviously incomplete: and each visit to Jezreel would have strengthened the king's wish to possess it. Ahab hoped at first to carry his point by negotiation and purchase. If Naboth would surrender the vineyard, Ahab would give him a better vineyard in another situation; or he would pay down in blocks of silver (there were no coins in those days in Israel) the full worth of the land. But Naboth was not open to a bargain. It was not that he enjoyed the baulking a great man's wishes in the spirit of that rough and surly independence which is sometimes fostered by the near neighbourhood of a court. It was not that he was governed by a natural sentiment, common in all ages and civilisation, against parting with old family property. It was that the Sacred Law did not permit the exchange or the sale. With a view to maintaining the original distribution of landed property among the tribes, and preventing the accumulation of large landed estates in a few hands, the Mosaic Law forbade the alienation of lands from families holding them, and especially the transfer of estates from one tribe to another.[1] This is the meaning of Naboth's exclamation: "The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee!"[2] He refused compliance with Ahab, not out of churlishness, or as a matter of family feeling, but on grounds of conscience.

Now, had Ahab been a good man, he would have felt that his desire had here reached its legitimate bounds. Desire is not always wrong: in its early stages, and so long as it is under the control of principle, it is a great and useful motive power in human life. But when it

[1] Lev. xxv. 23-28; Numb. xxxvi. 7. [2] 1 Kings xxi. 3.

finds itself in conflict with the rights of other men, and above all with the laws and rights of God, it must be sternly suppressed unless it is to lead to crime. When Naboth declined to sell or exchange his vineyard, Ahab ought to have put force upon himself, and have ceased to desire it.

Ahab went back to his palace—baulked of his object by the conscientious resistance of Naboth. His manner was that of a sulky child, which was not allowed to have its own way. The royal dinner had been served; and Ahab threw himself upon one of the couches on which the Easterns reclined at meals; but he lay down flat on it, and turned his face to the back of the couch, and would neither look at his guests nor partake of the banquet. It might well seem as though he had nothing to live for except obtaining possession of Naboth's vineyard. True, he was king of Israel; and surely he had work enough on his hands, and cares enough to tax his head and his heart;—the doubtful alliance with Judah, the constant wars with Syria, the fierce struggle within his dominions between the Baal-priesthood imported from Phœnicia, and the prophets of the Lord: the many omens of coming evil which threatened the future of his throne and dynasty. But for Ahab, these things did not exist, in presence of the one strong desire which he cherished—or rather which possessed him,—to become master of the vineyard of Naboth.

We may well pause to reflect on this feature of our human nature. Brethren, the impulsive force in life is not thought, not will, but desire. Thought sees its object; will gives orders with a view to attaining it: but without desire thought is powerless, and will, in the operative sense, does not exist. Desire is to the human soul, what gravitation is to the heavenly bodies: ascertain the object of the desire, and you know the direction in which the

soul is moving: ascertain the strength of the desire, and you know the rapidity of its movement. In the memorable words of St. Augustine, "Whithersoever I am carried forward, it is desire that carries me."[1] *Quocunque feror, amore feror.* If the supreme object of desire is God, then desire becomes the grace of charity, and carries the soul onwards and upwards to the true end of its existence. If the supreme object of desire be something earthly—some person or some possession,—then desire becomes concupiscence, and carries the soul downwards to those regions in which it is buried and stifled by matter and sense. Concupiscence is desire diverted from its true object, God, and centred upon some created object, which perverts and degrades it. And concupiscence grows by self-indulgence: it may easily pass a point at which it is no longer able to be controlled; it may absorb, as into a practically resistless current, all the other interests and movements of the soul; it may concentrate, with an all-engrossing importunity, the whole body and stock of feeling and passion, upon some trifling object on which it is bent, and which, by absorbing it, blinds it to the true proportion and value of things, and to the true meaning and import of action. So it was with Pharaoh, when he set out in pursuit of Israel: so it was with the vain Haman, when he had set his heart on exterminating the Jews: so it was with Ahab, when once Naboth's vineyard had become to him the one thing worth living for. For one passionate desire draws a veil over the world of thought, like a sea-mist over the landscape—burying all objects in indistinctness and haze, and bidding the traveller make for the point on which his heart is set with as much speed as possible.

[1] St. Augustine, *Confessions*, B. XIII. [ix.] 10.

II.

A second cause which would have blinded Ahab to the true character of his responsibility for the murder of Naboth was the ascendant influence and prominent agency of his queen, Jezebel.

Ahab was lying on his couch, when Jezebel appeared. The question, "Why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest no bread?"[1] marks the point at which, in Ahab, an illegitimate desire is invited to pass the boundary beyond which it is ready to acquiesce in crime. Ahab told her of his disappointment; and she at once resolved to take the matter into her own hands. After rallying her husband on allowing himself, king as he was, to be thwarted in his purpose by a mere subject, she bids him "arise, and eat bread, and let thy heart be merry"; adding, "I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite."[2]

Ahab was bad and weak: Jezebel was worse, and was strong. Jezebel is one of those portentous women, who appear from time to time in human history, and who outdo what is brutal and bad in bad and brutalised men. She came of a Pagan stock that was licentious and fierce; in which by the union of the crown with the priesthood of Baal, the hot Phœnician blood was made yet more lustful and ferocious by the traditional rites of the worship of Baal and Astarte. In her hands Ahab was a puppet. Even Elijah, who had slaughtered the Baal prophets before Ahab, fled from the threat of Jezebel into the distant wilderness. If Ahab was willing to let Naboth set his will at nought, Jezebel was not willing, and she had no scruples. The court would seem at this point to have removed to Samaria, some eight miles distant from Jezreel. Thence Jezebel indited a letter to the elders and notables of Jezreel, the members of the magistracy with

[1] 1 Kings xxi. 5. [2] *Ib.* 7.

whom the administration of justice lay, directing them to institute a charge against Naboth, that would deserve capital punishment. They were too demoralised to resist, or she was too formidable a person to be resisted by any but men with the spirit of martyrs; so the arrest, the accusation, the trial, the execution, went forward. When all was over, the report of what had happened was addressed to Jezebel. And then, "It came to pass, when Jezebel heard that Naboth was stoned, and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead." [1]

The murder then was planned and ordered by Jezebel; and Jezebel, not the king, received the report that her orders had been carried out. And this, no doubt, was how the matter appeared to Ahab; how he wished it to appear both to himself and to the world. When Naboth refused to sell the vineyard, had he not been passive—sulky and disappointed, no doubt, but still—passive? Had not Jezebel taken the matter out of his hands, gone her own way, acted on her own responsibility? She was a woman, and therefore, presumably, or at least conventionally, her action was not likely to have erred on the side of severity. She was an imperious woman, and therefore it would not have been easy for Ahab to resist her. Between Ahab and this foul deed of blood, there stood, as a second screen, the form of Jezebel. Jezebel, Ahab said to himself, was really responsible, and Jezebel's responsibility could not have been so grave as if she had been a man. And thus, in his mind, the occurrence would have tended to assume the character of a grave social accident, —in which by oversight or lassitude on his part, and excess of zeal on hers, a crime had been committed, which

[1] 1 Kings xxi. 15.

might be set down to the force of a combination of abstract circumstances, rather than to the charge of any one human agent. This is how Ahab would have tried to look at the matter. But after all, who was responsible for Jezebel's acting at all? Was Ahab then no longer king of Israel? Did his Pagan wife reign in his stead? Had he had no previous experience of her implacable temper, of her determined will? There was nothing in the nature of things to compel his acquiescence in the usurping and illegal boast, "I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite." He might, at that critical moment, have refused to let her act for him, or to let her act at all: but as he did not refuse, his acquiescence, whatever he might think of it, was virtually a commission, and her acts were, morally, his. *Qui facit per aliam facit per se*: what is done through another is done by a man himself. Ahab could not enjoy the results of Jezebel's achievement, and decline to accept responsibility for it; yet, no doubt, he was more than willing to do this—to believe that matters had drifted into other hands than his, and that the upshot, regrettable in one sense, but not unwelcome in another,—was beyond his control.

It is to-day as of old. The false conscience constantly endeavours to divest itself of responsibility for what has been done for us through others, or for what others have been allowed by us to do. This is the origin of that saying that "Corporations have no conscience." The fact is that every individual member of a corporation gets too easily into the habit of thinking that all or some of the other members are really answerable for the acts of the whole; and that each merely acquiesces in what others decide and do. But if everybody thinks this, where meanwhile does the real responsibility reside? It must lie somewhere; it cannot evaporate altogether. In very large bodies of men acting together the responsibility is divided

into very small portions of unequal magnitude; this is the case with nations and with churches. But the responsibility is not destroyed by being thus distributed; while, on the other hand, the smaller the corporation the greater the responsibility of each of its members. Thus the responsibility of each member of the British legislature for the well-being of the country is vastly greater than that of each Englishman who possesses a vote; and that of each member of the Cabinet is vastly greater than that of each member of Parliament. Ahab and Jezebel were, practically, the governing corporation in Israel: but Ahab could not shift his responsibility on Jezebel. There is no such thing as putting our personal responsibility into commission, and hoping that God will settle accounts not with us, but with our commissioner. In this sense, "No man may deliver his brother or make agreement unto God for him."[1]

Jezebel no doubt thought that she was Ahab's agent, just as Ahab said to himself that she was the real agent; but when a murder had been ordered, some one was responsible, and the fiction by which Ahab blinded his conscience would not live in the presence of Elijah—still less in the presence of God.

III.

A third cause which would have blinded Ahab to the real state of the case, was the perfection of legal form which had characterised the proceedings.

When Jezebel wrote to the magistrates of Jezreel, she had been very careful about legal propriety. She wrote in the king's name. She signed the letter with the king's seal, which would have borne the king's signature, and thus, when stamped on the writing, have made the actual

[1] Ps. xlix. 7.

signature unnecessary. Thus the letter had the character of a royal command; and it was addressed to the persons at Jezreel with whom the administration of justice lay,—the elders and notables, the local magistracy. These persons were in authority; and they were also Naboth's neighbours; they had witnessed his mode of life; and if they instituted a charge against him, there was *prima facie* ground for thinking that they had good reason to do so. Then the instructions of the letter were precise. A fast was to be proclaimed, in order to suggest that the guilt of some public crime rested like a heavy load upon the city, which therefore ought to humble itself before God. Then Naboth was to be brought to the public court of justice, seated—such was the custom—with his judges and the witnesses who accused him. According to the Law, two witnesses were to be produced; it was forbidden to convict any man of a capital charge if there was only one witness. Jezebel, indeed, suggests that they should be worthless and unprincipled persons,—"sons of Belial," —who might be trusted to give the sort of evidence that was wanted for her purpose. But this would not be a matter of notoriety. The strictly legal aspect of the proceedings would be unaffected by it. The witnesses were to say that Naboth had blasphemed God and the king: the first, a capital offence by Divine law; the second, by political custom. The punishment awarded would be that assigned by the law to the first and graver offence;—Naboth would be stoned to death outside the city: while his property, as that of a traitor, would be legally forfeited to the king. These instructions were punctually acted on; and the whole proceeding had the look of being regular and legal. There was only one, and that a moral, flaw —the hint about the character of the witnesses and the evidence they were to give: but Ahab would not have scanned too narrowly a single item, where the pro-

ceeding as a whole looked so well. The old religious forms had been respected; the constituted authorities had put the law in motion: nothing could have been so very far wrong when ancient rule and living administrators combined to bring about a particular result. Ahab might well let the matter rest, and enjoy the vineyard.

My brethren, Law is a great and sacred thing: it is a shadow upon earth of the Justice of God. The forms which surround it, the rules which govern it, the dignity and honour which belong to its representatives are all outworks of a thing in itself entitled to our reverence. But when its machinery is tampered with, as now by Jezebel; when a false witness or a biassed judge contributes to a result which if legal is not also moral; then law is like an engine off the rails; its remaining force is the exact measure of its capacity for mischief and wrong. Then indeed, if ever, *summum jus, summa injuria.* Naboth's trial and execution was in truth one of the earliest recorded samples in the world's history of that dreadful outrage against GOD and man,—a judicial murder; when the sword of justice smites down innocence and becomes the instrument of crime. The whole spirit and drift of law is abandoned; but its language and usages survive, and, as in Ahab's case, they form a screen between a guilty conscience and the reality. Of the authors or abettors of legal injustice it was said of old, "They will not be learned nor understand, but walk on still in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are out of course." [1]

"The foundations are out of course." Yes! that is the effect; bad law makes in many a case worse consciences; the deepest things in the moral and social life of man are ruined. The propriety of outward form in the condemnation of Naboth is the measure of the miserable self-deceit of Ahab.

[1] Ps. lxxxii. 5.

IV.

"Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" We can understand Ahab's cry now. He felt by a rapid instinct that Elijah would rend the screens behind which his conscience was crouching, and would place him face to face with the reality. "Hast thou found me?" Found me, —not merely enjoying the fruits of the crime, but stripped of all self-disguise, the real criminal. Yes! for Elijah—the self-deceptions of Ahab's personal desire, and a masterful wife's influence and agency, and outward legal form duly complied with, did not exist; they probably hid the true nature of Ahab's crime from no one but himself. With absolute frankness, the prophet brushes aside all these cobwebs of self-deception. He answered, "I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord. Hast thou killed and also taken possession?" And then the sentence: "In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine."[1]

Throughout this story we are reminded of another—David's murder of Uriah and marriage with Bathsheba. In both the crime was really due to unchecked indulgence of desire; in this case for another man's vineyard; in that, for another man's wife. In both the criminal seeks to compass his object through another's agency; here Jezebel is permitted—there Joab is bidden —to achieve it. In both there is an effort to let the crime appear to be the natural result of an existing machinery or system at work rather than of any one man's will: here it is treated as the outcome of a process of law, there as a casualty which results naturally from the rules and risks of battle. In both, however, care is taken that the machinery shall lead to the desired result: here by

[1] 1 Kings xxi. 19, 20.

suborning the false witnesses, there by placing Uriah in advance of the host under the walls of Rabbah. In these ways David even contrasts unfavourably with Ahab: his desire is itself of a more criminal character; his victim is a man of loftier unselfishness of purpose; and his own part in compassing the murder is more active and deliberate. And yet David, deeply as he had fallen, is not as Ahab; he does not see in the prophet Nathan a personal enemy; nay, he can even feel generous indignation at the story of the poor man's ewe lamb, which was the exact parallel to his own great sin. From David we hear no "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" From Ahab we hear no "I have sinned against the Lord;"[1] "against Thee, Thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight, that Thou mightest be justified in Thy saying, and clear when Thou art judged."[2] David's penitence precedes the announcement of his punishment: Ahab's, such as it was, follows it. David can only acknowledge his transgressions, and his sin is ever before him;[3] Ahab is terrified at the consequence of his wrong-doing,—at the prophet's picture of the dogs licking his blood where they licked the blood of Naboth,—at the predicted ruin of his house.

Let us carry away two lessons—if no more.

The first—to keep all forms of desire well under control—under the control of conscience—illuminated by principle, illuminated by faith. Some measure of earthly desire is necessary for exertion: but the fewer wants we have, the freer we are; and the freer we are, the happier we are. The one direction in which desire may be safely unchecked, is heavenward—"Like as the hart desireth the waterbrooks, so longeth my soul after Thee, O God."[4] In all other directions, desire, like the material element of fire, is a good servant, but a terrible master. Once let it

[1] 2 Sam. xii. 13. [2] Ps. li. 4. [3] *Ib.* 3. [4] *Ib.* xlii. 1.

pass beyond control, and almost anything in the way of crime is possible. *Obsta principiis.* Safety lies in taking and keeping it well in hand, and in doing this betimes.

And, secondly, for us Christians, the event or the man which discovers us to ourselves should be held to be not our enemy, but our best friend. There are many other things besides law which may, under certain circumstances, hide from us the facts of life and conscience. Society, classes, professions have their codes of conduct, which may absolve or condemn that which is not condemned or absolved by the Law of God. Do we not pray with the Psalmist, "Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart; prove me, and examine my thoughts"?[1] And if some Elijah visits us, in answer to that prayer, we know the power of Christ's Atoning Blood, and of His words of pardon, and of the grace of His Holy Spirit and His Sacraments. On this side of the grave nothing is irreparable; and the only thing to dread is to have done wrong and to live amidst self-cherished illusions as to the character of our deed. "If we walk in the light as God is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the Blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin."[2]

[1] Ps. cxxxix. 23. [2] 1 St. John i. 7.

SERMON XVI.

TRUTH UNWELCOME TO THE EVIL.

1 KINGS xxii. 7, 8.

And Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might inquire of him? And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil.

THE first lesson of the morning service for to-day[1] brings us to the close of an unhappy life—that of Ahab, king of Israel. It is remarkable that in the last scenes we find him intimately associated with Jehoshaphat, one of the most religious of the descendants of David. Probably the growing power of Syria led these kings to feel the political necessity of an alliance, for defensive purposes; and this feeling took a practical shape on the day—so unfortunate for the future of the kingdom of Judah—when Jehoshaphat's eldest son, Jehoram, was married to Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab. It was apparently this recent domestic tie between the families that led Jehoshaphat to pay Ahab a friendly visit in his capital, Samaria: and during this visit a question was raised, which led to the military expedition in which Ahab lost his life. It seems that in the lifetime of Ahab's father Omri, the Syrian king had taken from Israel the important town of Ramoth-Gilead beyond the Jordan; and although Ahab had since imposed a treaty upon Ben-

[1] The Twelfth Sunday after Trinity.

hadad, the son of the conqueror of Ramoth-Gilead, under the terms of which that stronghold was to be restored to Israel—no such restoration had ever taken place: and the Syrians still occupied it in force. And thus, one day, during Jehoshaphat's visit, the king of Israel said unto his servants, "Know ye that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we be still, and take it not out of the hand of the king of Syria?"[1] It may have occurred to Ahab's advisers, that Israel alone was not a match for the growing power of Damascus; and this led Ahab to ask Jehoshaphat whether he would join in an expedition for the capture of Ramoth-Gilead. Jehoshaphat readily consented; but, with his wonted piety, he begged Ahab, that before anything was definitely resolved on, the Will of the Lord should be ascertained. This, king Ahab proposed to do, by consulting four hundred prophets who were connected with the worship of Jehovah under the symbol of the Golden Calves at Bethel and Dan, and the prophets thus consulted unanimously advised the expedition: it would, they said, be successful. Jehoshaphat was still dissatisfied. These prophets were not true prophets of the Lord: they had even avoided (our translation does not make this clear) mentioning His Covenant Name, Jehovah: they were in separation from the old religion of Israel. Jehoshaphat naturally wished to know what a prophet would say who was loyal to the legitimate worship of God at Jerusalem. And Jehoshaphat said, "Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we may inquire of him?" And then Ahab gave the significant answer, "There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah: but," he added, "I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil."

Ahab probably thought of the recapture of Ramoth-Gilead as a duty which he owed to his subjects and to his

[1] 1 Kings xxii. 3.

office. He was, as a public man, by no means deficient in activity: and he was anxious to promote the interests and extend the credit of his realm. This is observable in his public works. His buildings at Samaria and other cities were very considerable undertakings: putting religious considerations aside in obedience to military ones, he rebuilt and fortified Jericho. The home of an ancient monarch was never regarded as a private edifice: the people relished and rejoiced in the state and magnificence which surrounded their rulers; they regarded it as in some sense their own. Ahab's palace and grounds at Jezreel,—so placed as to enable him to look across his kingdom, from Carmel and the Mediterranean on the west, to the hills of Gilead on the east,—were renowned for their beauty, and his subjects probably did not think the worse of him for constructing a curious and costly ivory house, which showed that he knew how to promote the fine arts, as they were then understood.

Ahab, too, was an experienced soldier; and he may have wished to bequeath to his son the full territory over which his father Omri had once reigned. No doubt the Syrians were powerful; but in two wars against them Ahab had triumphed. In the one, he had utterly routed Benhadad, who was besieging Samaria, by a sudden sally from the walls: the great king was banqueting in his tent with thirty-two vassal monarchs, and fled for his life to Damascus. In the other, when Benhadad had invaded Israel from the east of the Jordan, Ahab's victory was still more complete; Benhadad himself was taken prisoner, and was only released on condition of restoring all the cities of Israel,—Ramoth-Gilead among the rest, which the Syrians had taken,—and of allowing a factory of Hebrew traders to settle in Damascus. Ahab then might naturally hope to succeed in a third and yet more decisive war; and he held himself to be within his

rights in attempting to recover Ramoth-Gilead. Did not Ramoth-Gilead belong to Israel by the twofold title of original possession and recent restoration by treaty? Were not the Syrians violating their own engagements as well as the sacred territory, in keeping possession of it? Was not Ahab doing his simple duty as a king of Israel in endeavouring to recover it?

This was how the matter may have presented itself to Ahab. Men of the world make up their minds as to what they mean to do on grounds independent of religion; but they are not sorry to be able to quote plausible moral and religious reasons for their course of action. For the true and adequate religious consideration of the question, Ahab had no heart or inclination. Granted that the restoration of its ancient limits to the territory of Israel was a kingly duty, it was also, religiously viewed, a high privilege. The privilege of high service is not in the Divine Judgment always and everywhere open to anybody. It does not follow that when some public work has to be done for God and His Church, the man who is by office the natural man to do it, is morally and religiously well fitted to do it. The promised land had to be conquered; but the great leader who had brought Israel through the wilderness to the banks of the Jordan, was not permitted (and that for religious reasons) to cross it. The temple had to be built; but even David might not build it, because he was a man who had shed much blood. And if the integrity of the kingdom of Israel was to be restored, it must perchance be restored by other hands than those of a king whose weak character, not devoid of some amiable characteristics, but entirely controlled by his unscrupulous and depraved wife, had led him into so much violent wickedness. Ahab was under the solemn ban pronounced by Elijah after the murder of Naboth: and although this had not prevented his succeeding in defensive warfare, it

might forbid success when he was taking the offensive,—when he was not fighting for freedom and life, but for the restoration of its ancient glories to the kingdom of Israel, of its ancient limits to the Land of Promise.

A religious view of the matter like this would have been treated by Ahab, we may be sure, with great impatience. Until a man has learnt to look at life from a higher point of view, he cannot understand why he should be religiously disqualified for anything that he chooses to attempt. Religion, he probably thinks is, like fire, a good servant but a bad master: a useful sanction, if it can be had, for plans and enterprises which are resolved on independently, but an intolerable intruder if it presumes to interfere with or condemn them. For Ahab, religion was very satisfactorily represented by the four hundred prophets who were under the leadership of that impetuous yet pliant courtier Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah. These four hundred prophets would of themselves have no prepossessions for or against going up to Ramoth-Gilead. They might be depended on to say just what Ahab wished. Their connection with the schismatical worship at Bethel and Dan ensured their devotion to the interests of the court of Israel. Their facile obsequiousness threw out into sharper and more unwelcome relief the fearless independence of Micaiah the son of Imlah; and it helps to explain the hatred with which Ahab regarded him.

And here we may stop in order to observe, that, deeply interesting as are the historical and political bearings of the narrative before us, they are not by any means its highest interest. It is most interesting as showing, on the one hand, how courageously the cause of truth and duty may be defended in very difficult circumstances; and on the other hand, how piteously the human soul may vacillate and waver, when confronted by what it suspects

to be truth,—if indeed it do not deliberately prefer what is agreeable to what is true—to its own utter confusion.

I.

We have here, I say, an admirable lesson on the consistent intrepidity with which truth and duty may be insisted on in difficult circumstances. Let us fix our attention on the figure of Micaiah the son of Imlah. He is not one of the prophets who are prominent in sacred history. He has left no writings. And as a man of action, he is entirely overshadowed by his great contemporary Elijah. But Micaiah belonged to that sacred line of fearless witnesses for God, who knew how to respect earthly greatness, yet for whom earthly greatness has neither charms nor terrors: men who appear in royal courts, but to speak in the name of the King of kings. Such was Moses before Pharaoh, crying, "Let My people go:"[1] such was Nathan before David, proclaiming, "Thou art the man:"[2] such was Elijah before Ahab, telling him, "It is thou that troublest Israel:"[3] such was Daniel before Nebuchadnezzar,[4] and Nehemiah before Artaxerxes,[5] and—greatest of them all—St. John the Baptist before Herod Antipas, with his simple fearless message, "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife."[6] To this line of chosen souls—the very chivalry of the saints—belonged Micaiah; incapable of any gratuitous disrespect to an earthly ruler, but still more incapable of winning a king's favour or disarming his wrath by saying what was not true. The work of Micaiah's life was to maintain in schismatic and apostate Israel the claims of the ancient worship and revelation which had its centre in Jerusalem. Micaiah could not often say what was agreeable to Ahab, without being

[1] Exod. viii. 1, 20; ix. 1, 13. [2] 2 Sam. xii. 7. [3] 1 Kings xviii. 18.
[4] Dan. iv. 19-27. [5] Neh. ii. 1-7. [6] St. Matt. xiv. 4.

false to his own deepest religious convictions; and he had, no doubt, already had interviews with Ahab, not recorded in Scripture, such as that which Josephus mentions after the defeat of Benhadad,[1] which had impressed Ahab with a vivid sense of the prophet's uncompromising and fearless character. So Ahab knew instinctively what Micaiah would say on the matter in hand. A religious creed has its laws and its obligations, which can often be anticipated by those who do not share it. Ahab in his secret soul knew well enough that, in Micaiah's, as in Elijah's, case, the opposition to himself was in no sense the result of a personal antagonism or prejudice, and that these prophets, whether they were denouncing idolatry, or rebuking injustice, or advising or dissuading from a line of public conduct, were simply obeying convictions with which they dared not trifle. But Ahab—in this resembling the first Napoleon—tried to persuade others, and in the end himself, that whatever was said or done in opposition to his wishes was said or done from a low motive of personal spite. "I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil."

Certainly Ahab was not wrong in anticipating an adverse answer from Micaiah. But as Jehoshaphat was not satisfied with the four hundred, and as Ahab may have had misgivings which helped to counterbalance his wish to listen only to what was in keeping with his purpose, a eunuch was sent to fetch Micaiah. Then followed a scene which must long have dwelt in the memory of all who witnessed it. In the gate of Samaria, probably the northern gate which opened on the road to Jezreel, and which consequently overlooked the scene of Benhadad's first discomfiture, the kings of Israel and Judah sat on their portable thrones, while all the prophets prophesied before them. There were the four hundred prophets of

[1] Josephus, *Antiquities*, viii. 14. 5.

the golden calves, and at their head Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah, who now appeared with horns of iron, as the prophetic symbol of the power that would conquer the Syrian enemy. "With these," he cried, "shalt thou push the Syrians until thou have consumed them."[1] The four hundred followed the guidance of Zedekiah: Ahab, they shouted, might go up to Ramoth-Gilead, for Jehovah (now the Sacred Name is pronounced by them, probably because they knew that Micaiah had been sent for), Jehovah will deliver it into the king's hand. The eunuch who went to fetch Micaiah entreated him not to break the harmony of the proceedings by prophesying in any other sense than that of the four hundred: but the prophet answered, as Balaam had answered centuries before, that he must speak as he is bidden from Heaven.[2] On Micaiah's appearance, Ahab inquired whether he advised the proposed expedition. "Go and prosper," replied Micaiah, "for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king."[3] Micaiah's manner must have convinced Ahab that the prophet's real meaning was very different from that of his words; that he was only repeating, in an ironical way, the shouted plaudits of the four hundred. Ahab therefore again desired him to tell nothing "but that which is true in the Name of the Lord."[4] Then Micaiah uttered his solemn forecast with dread solemnity; he drew rapidly a picture of the morrow of the coming defeat. "I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the Lord said, These have no master; let them return every man to his house in peace."[5] And then, feeling that he must justify his own dissent from the four hundred, he proceeded to narrate a vision, which showed how and why they had been deceived: they were but dupes of an evil agency, permitted to lead Ahab onwards to his ruin.

[1] 1 Kings xxii. 11.
[2] *Ib.* 14; Numb. xxii. 38.
[3] 1 Kings xxii. 15.
[4] *Ib.* 16.
[5] *Ib.* 17.

Such bold language could not be forgiven. "And the king of Israel said, Take Micaiah, and carry him back unto Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son; and say, Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction, and with water of affliction, until I come in peace."[1]

Observe the great courage and dignity of Micaiah's bearing before Ahab. Poor, unconspicuous, unbefriended, he stands out as the solitary witness to unwelcome truth before a contemptuous court and an angry king. Even the pious Jehoshaphat does not interfere in his favour, and is not governed by his advice. Micaiah speaks to no purpose: his advice is disregarded: he is punished for giving it. He might seem to have no place in a scene where servility and passion carry all before them. He had to witness the insolent triumph of Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah, as he was being hurried off to the dungeons beneath the royal palace in Samaria.

It is, my brethren, comparatively easy to bear witness to truth when a large public sympathises with you; when the offence of the Cross, as St. Paul calls it,[2] has ceased. But to be a Micaiah: to encounter nothing but a wall of impenetrable prejudice: to speak with a knowledge that the most unworthy motives will be attributed to you for saying what you say: to speak as to the winds, without any visible influence on the conduct of others, or on the course of events: and to take the consequences—failure and suffering—with all the dignity of resignation to the Divine will, this is a great grace: Micaiah ranks, we may be sure, high among the ancient servants of God.

And in all ages of Christendom, and in all ranks of life, Micaiah is again and again needed. And he has his successors. The simple courage which refuses to acquiesce in what is wrong, or to say that wrong is right, only because

[1] 1 Kings xxii. 26, 27. [2] Gal. v. 11.

wrong is powerfully recommended, is, thank God, never wholly wanting. In many a school, in many a family, in many a public office, in mess-rooms, in boards and committees, in parliaments, and cabinets, and church gatherings, there are from time to time cries for an expedition to Ramoth-Gilead, for some course of conduct which gratifies social ambition or the instinct of mischief, or is likely to satisfy the love of wealth, or is demanded by wounded self-love, or personal animosity —something which falls in with ruling prejudices or enthusiasms, but is in itself wrong. And the schoolboy who will not join in some organised scheme of mischief or rebellion; the member of a family that will not sanction a dishonourable contract; the clerk or the young officer who raises his voice against fashionable profligacy; the committee-man, or the minister of the Crown, who will resign his place rather than violate his higher sense of duty; the bishop or churchman who puts truth and justice before the voice of an uninformed majority—these in their various ways are Micaiahs. To be right with the many is a blessing; but to be right, and yet alone, may be a higher distinction—

"Among the faithless, faithful only he."[1]

II.

But this history also illustrates the inconsistency and vacillation of which the human soul may be guilty in dealing with recognised or suspected truth, which it will not frankly accept, yet dares not finally reject.

The trial of royalty in all ages is its isolation. Few courtiers will risk their place by offering advice which, however sound, is unwelcome: and a king sees his ideas and wishes reflected in, not corrected by, the minds of those around him. The isolation of the throne, and the

[1] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, v. 897.

immense moral disadvantages it entails, is one reason among others for joining earnestly in those prayers for the Sovereign which have always been a conspicuous feature of the services of the Christian Church.

But crowned heads are not by any means the only people who are liable to such practical isolation. It may befall any one in a position of influence or command,—trusted leaders of opinion, bishops, employers of labour: any of us may be thus isolated as we get on in life and become heads of families, with children and servants looking up to us and depending on us, but never venturing to offer us sincere advice. Exactly in the degree in which time and circumstances force us into a position of this kind should we welcome the voice of a Micaiah, who will not shout, "Go up to Ramoth-Gilead," with all the rest. The aged Eli could even listen to the voice of the child Samuel, though telling of his own humiliation and punishment. Ahab might have learnt from Micaiah enough to have saved him from the bloody death upon which he was rushing.

And, indeed, Ahab may seem to have been to a certain extent alive to this danger of his position. He could not altogether escape from a desire to know the real truth, or from its fascinating impression and force, while yet he was angry with it, treated it as though it had a personal grudge of some sort against himself, and while partly deferring to it, ended by defying it, and perished accordingly.

It would seem that Ahab could not divest himself of the belief that Micaiah's advice was better worth listening to than he admitted in words.

Had Micaiah been, in Ahab's real judgment, a man whose utterances were only dictated by a vulgar personal animosity against himself, Ahab would not have cared to listen to his advice; he would have overruled the desire of Jehoshaphat that such a person should be consulted in

a matter so seriously affecting the well-being of their kingdoms and their personal safety; or, having summoned him as a matter of courtesy, he would have dismissed him as soon as possible, on the ground that, say what he might, his advice would be worthless. But during the interview, Ahab's anxiety to get at Micaiah's real mind is very remarkable. Micaiah, taking Ahab at his word,—as a monarch who liked to have agreeable things said to him whether they were true or not,—mockingly repeated the chant of the four hundred: "Go up to Ramoth-Gilead, and prosper, for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king." If Ahab had had no belief in Micaiah's message, he would not have cared to hear him further. But he does insist with great earnestness that he should tell him nothing but what is true in the Name of the Lord. Once more, when Micaiah had told Ahab the full and bitter truth, and Ahab had defied it, by imprisoning Micaiah for telling it, and by engaging in the forbidden expedition against Ramoth-Gilead, Ahab still showed that he could not treat Micaiah's words simply as falsehood. Why did Ahab disguise himself when he went into the battle? To do so was inconsistent with usage, inconsistent with his personal dignity as king and leader of his people, inconsistent with the safety of his ally and connection, Jehoshaphat, whose person was thereby exposed to much greater danger; inconsistent with the discipline of his army, and the best interests of the enterprise he had at heart. But he could not help it: Micaiah's picture of Israel as sheep without a shepherd haunted him: at any rate he would try to avoid his predicted fate by not offering himself as a target for the Syrian archers. He could not, indeed, take precautions against the bow drawn at a venture which smote the king of Israel between the joints of his harness:[1] but he showed in his disobedience

[1] 1 Kings xxii. 34.

how little he was able to rid himself altogether of the empire of the truth which he disobeyed.

He professes, you see, to believe the prophet's message to be dictated by a personal animosity against himself, yet he will listen to it: he sees that the prophet is not giving his real mind, and he is most anxious to extract it: he insults and imprisons the prophet, and disobeys the drift of his message, yet he acts in his last hours as though he suspected after all that that message might be true. Nothing can well be more irrational, and yet (must we not say?) nothing can be truer to the permanent instincts of human nature when in Ahab's circumstances.

We need not go far to find parallels to this: such as are, for instance, passionate protestations of rejection of the claims of the Christian Creed, coupled with evidently sincere anxiety to know exactly what it does and does not teach, and sometimes with actions and courses of conduct which show that its claims are not really set altogether aside as worthless, or even that, as the end draws near, it is deemed prudent to act as though, after all, it might be true. Such is the secret penetrating power of truth, extorting homage from the most reluctant wills, imposing hesitations on the fiercest opponents, winning victories where they would least be anticipated, and, like its Author and Subject, being ruler even in the midst among its enemies.[1]

III.

Once more, we have before us here a sample of the disposition, so deeply rooted in the human mind, to seek in religion less what is true than what is agreeable.

Had Ahab said, "I hate Micaiah, for he does not prophesy what is true concerning me," that,—however mistaken as an assertion,—would have been intelligible. But

[1] Ps. cx. 2.

he did say, "I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." What if the evil were, after all, as we know it was, the plain truth? Ahab may remind us of the conduct of people, of whom we may have heard, who having organic disease in their constitutions, and shrewdly expecting that they have it, send for a first-class physician, and then, when he admits to them that their suspicions are only too well grounded, become violently angry with him; and when he adds that their only chance of delaying their fate lies in adopting a certain diet and rule of life, do in fact adopt it, yet dismiss the physician who has prescribed it. Certainly Eastern despots have no monopoly of an irrational temper of this description. Democracies may be just as irrational as despots; human nature in a multitude of human beings being, on the average, precisely what it is in a single man. History shows that Greek republics could be as cruel and unreasonable as tyrants. It was not Pilate, but the multitude, which cried, "Crucify Him!"[1] It was a Christian church of which an Apostle had to ask, "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?"[2]

Ahab did not hesitate to say that he hated the prophetic message—not because it was untrue, but because it bore hardly on himself. Many an objector to Christianity in our day, if he said what he really thinks, would say, "I hate Christianity, because, if it is true, it does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. It makes such serious demands: it proposes so high a standard: it implies that so much of what I think, say, and do is a great mistake, that I must away with it. I cannot do and be what it enjoins without doing great violence to my inclinations, my passions, my fixed habits of life and thought." This, before his conversion, was the case with St. Augustine, that great servant of Christ whose name

[1] St. Mark xv. 8-13. [2] Gal. iv. 16.

occurs in the Calendar of our Prayer-Book for this very day.[1] Augustine tells us in his Confessions how completely he was enchained by his passions, and how, after he had become intellectually satisfied of the truth of the Creed of the Church of Christ, he was held back from conversion by the fear that he would have to give up so much to which he was attached.[2] In the end we know he broke his chains, the chains which held Ahab captive.—In such cases lasting self-deceit is easy. Men treat what is really a warp in the will as if it were a difficulty of the understanding; but the real agent—ought I not to say, the real culprit?—is the will. The will sees Revelation advancing to claim the allegiance of the soul; it sees that to admit this claim will oblige it to forego much and to do much that is unwelcome to flesh and blood, and so it makes an effort to clog or hinder the action of the understanding. Its public language is, "I cannot accept this religion, because it makes this or that assertion which, to my mind, is open to historical, or philosophical, or moral objections of a decisive character." But if it saw deeper into itself, it would say, "I hate this Creed, for it doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil, if I continue to live as I do."

And is not this devotion to the agreeable, at the cost of the true, to be found among Christians? Are there not aspects of revealed truth, portions of revealed truth, which some of us shrink from or dislike, because they condemn us as we are, and warn us that we must be something else before we die? Have we never heard of certain chapters in the Bible being never read, even by believers in the Bible professedly, because they are thought difficult to reconcile with other chapters which are assumed to contain the essence of the Gospel; really, because they put before us those sterner and more awful sides of truth which that which is lowest and weakest in our characters would have

[1] August 28. [2] St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Bk. VIII. [v.] 10-12.

us forget? It is not pretended that these portions of Scripture rest upon defective evidence of their genuineness: they are judged by the test, not of truth but of acceptableness; they are avoided, because they do not prophesy good concerning certain readers, but evil. And in like manner particular Christian doctrines are rejected, not really on the score of deficient warrant, but because they are unwelcome to flesh and blood: they bring the unseen world so much nearer: they imply so much higher a standard of duty than we are willing to accept. Who does not see how easily this might happen, as it has happened, in respect of the Atonement—that overwhelming manifestation of the Love of God for men in the Redeemer, which, if it be sincerely believed, cannot but demand the complete self-surrender of the Redeemed? Or, again, the great and awful doctrines of Grace, or of the Sacraments which are the ordinary channels of Grace,—doctrines which throw over life so entirely a new aspect, which must mean and compel so much in practice, if they are believed at all? Or revelations of the world beyond the grave—the revealed destiny of the saved and of the lost—who does not see how easily we may turn away from them, because, for the moment, we have reasons for shrinking from them? May God give us minds open to all the rays of His blessed truth, and a good will to obey and act on it, whatever it may be: that by His holy inspiration we may ever seek those things that be good, and by His merciful guidance may perform the same!

SERMON XVII.

ELISHA AT THE ASSUMPTION OF ELIJAH.

2 KINGS ii. 1.

And it came to pass, when the Lord would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal.

THE translation or assumption of Elijah probably interests more people, and more powerfully, than any event, with at most two or three exceptions, in the Old Testament. Elijah himself is always interesting. He interests us as children, on account of the variety and splendour of his adventures; and he interests us still more as men, on account of his unique place in Sacred History, and his value as a study of character. Of the two great figures which the wild highland race of Gilead contributed to the history of Israel,—Jephthah and Elijah,—Elijah is incomparably the more commanding. Great in himself, he was made greater by the circumstances with which he was in almost perpetual conflict. To the settled communities of Judah and Ephraim he must have worn almost as strange a look as he would present could he appear in Regent Street or Ludgate Hill, with his long thick hair hanging down his back, with his skin girdle round his waist, and his cape of sheepskin, or mantle, as it is called, thrown loosely across his shoulders. When, from time to time, Elijah appeared, no one could exactly say whence, it was felt that something evil had been done, or

that something tragical was impending. He was emphatically a prophet of judgment. His life was a long struggle against the utter apostasy from the moral law and worship of the Lord God of Israel to which the court of Israel was committed. This it was which led him to proclaim the penal drought of three years' duration to Ahab; to confront Ahab when, with Obadiah, he was making a survey of the impoverished land; to bid him summon the eight hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and Ashtoreth to their judgment and doom on Carmel; to denounce to Ahab the penal visitations of God in the garden of the murdered Naboth, outside the royal city of Jezreel; to foretell to Ahaziah his approaching death, when he had sent to the heathen oracle of Ekron to ascertain the issue of his illness; to call down fire upon the companies of soldiers which were sent to take him in his hermitage on Mount Carmel; and even to send a letter to the apostatising king of Judah, Jehoram, announcing his approaching end. And it was this struggle against fashionable evil which forced Elijah, again and again, to seek safety by betaking himself to some remote hiding-place; at one time in the torrent-bed of the Cherith, which ran like a deep fissure through his native hills of Gilead; at another, strangely enough, in the very heart of the country of his enemies, with a widow woman at Zarephath, between Tyre and Sidon; at another in the territory of Judah at Beersheba; at another amid the rocky precipices of Horeb, the scene of his greatest vision; at another in caves on the slopes of Carmel. His life was by turns that of a statesman whose strong will swayed the fall and rise of kingdoms, and that of a hermit whose long vigils and prayers were unwitnessed by any human eye. And now this life, so active and so passive, so strong and so yielding, so courageous and at times so verging on despair, has come to its close. The prophet is at Gilgal,—

the village, we can hardly doubt, of that name in Samaria,—when he is told that the time of his departure is at hand. "And it came to pass that when the Lord would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal."

The verse before us directs attention to a point which evidently has a first place in the sacred writer's mind, and indeed governs his narrative. It is that at this supreme moment of his life Elijah was not alone: he went with Elisha from Gilgal. The narrative which follows is not more an account of Elijah's passing away into another world than of Elisha's relation to him at the time: and we shall perhaps consider it most usefully if we place ourselves at the point of view of the servant rather than that of the master, and accompany Elisha from Gilgal to the closing scene beyond the Jordan. There are characters and subjects which, like the orb of the sun at noonday, cannot be gazed at directly; they are best understood if we stand aside to look at them, or try to measure their import by tracing its effect on the conduct and destiny of others.

I.

And here we note, first, the strong overmastering affection which bound Elisha to Elijah. Ever since Elisha's call at Abel-meholah he had been generally in Elijah's company, on the footing at once of a trusted younger companion and a confidential servant. The same sort of relation had existed between Moses and Joshua, as a preparation for the duties to which Joshua would be called after the great lawgiver's death. It was a relationship, on one side of fatherly affection, on the other of devoted service and reverence. Elisha's title of honour in later years was, "The son of Shaphat, who poured water

on the hands of Elijah."[1] The phrase was vivid: it implied that the solitary, stern, reserved prophet admitted his younger friend to the high honour of intimacy and service, and that this permission had been gratefully accepted. And so they moved through life, the wisdom of years and of commanding inspiration leaning, as it might seem, on the active enthusiasm of generous youth, and deepening mutual attachment by the interchange of what each had to give: strong grasp of truth, patient thought, wise counsel on one side, and all the varied attentions of loving service on the other.

But now Elijah had been warned that the end was near; and he would rather be alone. Much was before him which no one would fully understand but he; scenes to which the language of sympathy is inadequate, and amid which anything that it could attempt would be almost an impertinence. Elijah would be alone. Solitude was never unwelcome to Elijah: it never is unwelcome to those who have a constant sense of the presence of God, and who find in communion with Him, and in discovering more and more of their own condition with respect of His Will, more than enough to occupy them. They only are entirely dependent upon the society of their fellow-creatures who live on the surface of their existence, and who have no true experience of what lies beneath. A great soul, too, like Elijah has its appropriate and inevitable reserve. While shallower natures talk glibly of all that passes within them, and find a satisfaction in taking the world into confidence, more solid characters shrink from this exposure; just as a deep volume of water rolls on in silence towards the sea, while a shallow brook ripples chatteringly over its rocky bed, and proclaims to all the world how small are its resources. Nor does the love of solitude at certain times in life imply lack of

[1] 2 Kings iii. 11.

sympathy: since true sympathy has other and better ways of expressing itself than incessant talking.

> "Oft when we pine, afar from those we love,
> More close are knit the spirits' sympathies
> By mutual prayer; distance itself doth prove
> A greater nearness; with such stronger ties
> Spirit with spirit talks, that when our eyes
> Behold each other, something sinks within,
> Mocked by the touch of life's realities."[1]

Nor in desiring to be alone was Elijah thinking only of himself. No doubt he wished to spare his faithful companion the pain of parting. If Elisha would only remain at Gilgal, he would hear somewhere, and at some time, that his beloved master had disappeared. There would be no picture of a scene, never to be blotted out from memory, to haunt Elisha's later life. There would only be the contrast—the great contrast—between visible presence and felt absence; all the connecting links would belong to imagination and conjecture. So out of affection for Elisha, no less than from personal feeling and preference, Elijah would have said unto Elisha, "Tarry here, I pray thee, for the Lord hath sent me to Bethel."[2]

But affection like Elisha's does not always enter into the motives which would have ruled Elijah. It takes no thought of self: it would rather suffer from being close to its object, than escape suffering by distance. And it is too impetuous, not unfrequently, to be entirely considerate; like those warm-hearted foreigners, who, thinking only of the immediate satisfaction of the sentiment of attachment, clasp some reserved English friend to their arms in the public streets. Elisha did not care for the pain which the sight of the departing Elijah might cause him: and he could not stop to understand the yearning for solitude which, in those solemn moments, the great

[1] *The Baptistery*, Part I., Image 5. [2] 2 Kings ii. 2.

prophet would feel. Hence the exclamation, "As the Lord liveth, and thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee."[1] At Bethel, and again at Jericho, Elijah renewed the request that Elisha would remain behind; and at Bethel and at Jericho—in the same terms—Elisha refused.[2] He would cling to his great master to the last, no matter what he might have to endure in doing so. They should be parted, if at all, by a higher than any human judgment. And each time, it is remarkable, Elijah gave way.

That iron will, before which kings and captains quailed in terror, bent with obedient sympathy to the reiterated protestation of an affectionate servant. They were together through the whole of that last journey—at Gilgal, at Bethel, at Jericho, and at last beyond the Jordan.

We may have seen something of the same kind in a last illness—an illness extended like Elijah's last journey—over three or more stages before the end is reached. There is the first stage, when it is understood that things are looking very serious—the stage from Gilgal to Bethel; and then there is a halt, and we think that recovery is even probable. Then comes a second stage, from Bethel to Jericho—when a new advance is made in the downward course, and the gravest apprehensions are entertained. But there comes another halt at Jericho: again hope,—always buoyant and optimising,—flickers up into a belief that convalescence is possible, until the illness takes a fatal turn, and the patient sets out to cross that dark river which is never repassed.

Few of us are like the saintly solitary of ancient Israel, so plunged in the sense of the encompassing Presence of God, as to desire no created sympathy to supplement that satisfaction which is drawn from felt contact with the Uncreated and the Infinite. Few can lie down to die, like that great figure of the Middle Ages, at Salerno, with

[1] 2 Kings ii. 2. [2] *Ib.* 3.

the exclamation, "I have loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore I die in exile."[1]

Most of us yearn, at that solemn time, for human words of love and pity, and human faces, and human hands, which soften, if they cannot delay, the stern approach of death; and human friends who should accompany us to the gate, if there they must leave us and can pass no further.

But a long illness, with its three or more stages—continued week after week, month after month—is a trial even to devoted affection. Affection is sometimes keen between Gilgal and Bethel; cooler between Bethel and Jericho; scarcely better than a mechanical service in the later stage. To be tended by the love of an Elisha is a great blessing: to be an Elisha to some solitary soul, which in its isolation scarcely dares reveal itself to any human heart, is perhaps a greater. Such experiences, such duties, come to most of us sooner or later in life: but Elisha little thought when he first set eyes on Elijah in the field of Abel-meholah, that he would be the witness of his last hours between Gilgal and the Jordan.

II.

Next we may notice the vexations and annoyances to which Elisha's devotion to his master exposed him during the last hours of Elijah's life. At Bethel and Jericho, there were schools of the prophets, institutions which dated from the days of Samuel. In these establishments, young men who had, or were thought likely to possess, the prophetical gift, were taught the meaning, especially the moral meaning, of the Sacred Law, and the whole body of truth which the Prophetical Order had gradually learnt from the more eminent of its inspired members. These

[1] Gregory VII.

schools of the prophets were more like Diocesan Colleges for training young men for Holy Orders than any other institutions among us: they were centres of religious information and religious influence—houses in which the spirit of the order of prophets was carefully fostered and strengthened, and from which issued men who profoundly influenced the religious convictions and conduct of their contemporaries. Such schools or colleges there were at Ramah, at Bethel, at Jericho, at Gilgal, and elsewhere. Some of them were very numerously attended: and all of them were of real importance to the religious life of the country.

Elijah's lofty character and conspicuous services would have won the hearts and kindled the imaginations of the young men who attended the prophetical colleges: and it is possible that in making his way towards the Jordan, the frontier of his native Gilead, where he hoped to die, he so shaped his course as to be able to take solemn leave of these great communities settled in Bethel and Jericho. From Gilgal the travellers arrived first of all at Bethel; and here the members of the prophetical college showed what we must at least think a great want of consideration for Elisha. Somehow or other, whether through a revelation conveyed to some other prophet, or through a report of what Elijah had been saying at Gilgal, and possibly elsewhere, the rumour was in circulation at Bethel that Elijah would soon be leaving the world. The school of the prophets at Bethel do not seem to have looked upon Elisha with very favourable eyes. They probably regarded him as an inferior sort of person, who had arrived at an eminence which he did not really deserve, through his association with the great Elijah. Elisha, it is probable, had never had any connection with these prophetical schools, and their members may have been disposed to regard him much as some clergymen who have had an University education, are said to regard other clergymen

who have never been at the University. Men are really to be valued, not by their antecedents or decorations, or the accidents of their education, but by what they are in themselves, by what God's wonder-working grace has made them, by their intellectual and moral endowments, by their place and work in the Church of God. But human nature is much the same in its leading characteristics from age to age, and the members of the prophetical college at Bethel reflected with some satisfaction that when Elijah was withdrawn, Elisha would find his level. It was not disagreeable to them to tell Elisha what was coming, and to observe the effect that the news would have upon him. "And the sons of the prophets that were at Bethel came forth to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to-day? And he said, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace."[1] The same ill-natured question was put to Elisha by the members of the college of prophets at Jericho, and it elicited the same reply.[2] There was plainly a common understanding—a feeling running throughout the prophetic order, to which the question gave expression; and the strength of the feeling may be measured by the fact that even the presence of Elijah did not silence the questioners. Their jealousy of Elisha was too keen to allow them to understand what was due to the last hours of the prophet who was so soon to leave them.

It has been within the experience of many of us, I suppose, that the pettinesses of human nature are by no means always awed into silence by the presence of death. Nothing is more melancholy in the history of Royalty than the undercurrent of selfish intrigue and gossip which so often surrounds the dying moments of a sovereign. The scramble for place and power is with difficulty, if at all,

[1] 2 Kings ii. 3. [2] *Ib.* 5.

delayed until the last breath of the dying ruler has been drawn. The rivalries which have hitherto been repressed by an instinct of prudence, will break out, even prematurely, into most unlovely forms of activity: and display, on a pathetic scale, the hollowness of the life whose outward mien has been that of a perfectly sincere and easy courtesy. Nor need we have recourse to memoirs of Court life to illustrate this insensibility of selfish passion to all that is implied in the presence of death. In very humble families a death is often discounted long before it has actually taken place. Keen eyes picture to themselves the altered circumstances of the family; the new social centre of gravity; the new distribution of income; the putting down the influential from their seat, and the exalting those who wish to take their place; the new domestic order which will unfold itself when the will has been read, and its probable disappointments and surprises have been duly appreciated. You know, my brethren, whether I am exaggerating. But Elisha's questioners are often asking their questions under new circumstances: "Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to-day?" And wherever the solemnity of death is understood, the profanity of intruding these topics is understood too; and the answer of every reverent and healthy soul is Elisha's: "Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace."

III.

Lastly, there was the solemn interchange of confidences between the departing prophet and his successor. If the last hours of a friend's life often make heavy demands on affection, if the sick-room has sometimes its trials, and even its degradations, it also not seldom has blessings that are all its own.

Elisha had resisted Elijah's last injunction to stay at Jericho, and he had turned a deaf ear to the question addressed to him by the local college of prophets. Elijah and Elisha had walked across the plain, in full view of the associated prophets who were gathered to watch them from the rocky heights behind the town of Jericho: and then Elijah had smitten with his mantle the waters of the Jordan; and they had passed to its eastern side—the side of Elijah's native Gilead.

And now the closing scene was imminent. But before it took place the departing prophet, as if recognising the devoted affection of the man who, in spite of himself, had followed him from Gilgal, wished to give a token of his interest and gratitude. "Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee."[1] It is the language of one who knows that he has power with God, and is too sincere to disguise it. Prayer moves the Will that rules the world; and those who have been, for long years, living near the Almighty, may speak of answers to prayer with a humble confidence which would be folly or irreverence in other men.

"Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee." What should Elisha answer? He is on his trial, as was Solomon in the vision or dream at Gibeon; he is balancing perhaps between matter and spirit, between earthly ambition or gain and the generous promptings of disinterested service. "Ask what I shall do for thee." What should Elisha ask? Should it be long life, or great wealth, or the humiliation of personal rivals? Solomon had not asked for these things; he had asked for nothing material, nothing selfish or base; but for a spirit of practical wisdom that would enable him to rule his people.[2] Elisha will ask for that which in a prophet would answer to the royal gift of

[1] 2 Kings ii. 9.

[2] 1 Kings iii. 9.

wisdom—a double portion of the spirit of his master.[1] This has been often understood to mean a prophetical gift twice as great in its range and intensity as that intrusted to Elijah. If that were the meaning of the phrase, Elisha's prayer was not granted. It cannot be said that Elisha—startling as were his miracles—occupies so great a place in sacred history as did Elijah. He is, indeed, as a type of our Lord, greater than the type of our Lord's forerunner. But in their whole manner of life and conduct the two prophets differ too widely to admit properly of being compared. Elijah was a recluse, leading a life, for the most part, remote from the haunts of men: Elisha, a dweller in cities, on familiar terms with his fellow-men, sharing their habits and influencing their lives by constant contact. Elijah belonged to the desert: Elisha to civilisation. Elijah's work was destructive—the sworn enemy of all persons and institutions which interfered with the honour of the Lord God of Israel: Elisha's career was constructive and conciliatory. His relations with Naaman the Syrian are inconceivable in Elijah. He was the friend and adviser of influential persons: he was even welcome at the court: a king mourned by the side of his dying bed. In Elijah's case, the miracles were but illustrations of character; in Elisha's, character only forms a thin link between successive miracles. In short, the whole temper and career of the two prophets differ so, that the specific spirit of Elijah, instead of being doubled in Elisha, was scarcely reproduced in him at all. The phrase points to the general prophetical gift; and Elisha asks that he might receive not twice as great a gift as his master, but, as the Hebrew term implies, the double portion of an eldest son; twice as much as that of any other prophet. But Elijah hesitates: "Elisha," he says, "has asked a hard thing."[2] Elijah may be able, by his inter-

[1] 2 Kings ii. 9. [2] *Ib.* 10.

cession, to procure this boon, but also he may fail. If Elisha sees him at the moment of his departure, the prayer will have been granted: but only if he does see him.

Elisha's motive for such a request will seem clear, if we put ourselves in his place. The fortunes of the true religion in Israel were still at a very low ebb, and in losing Elijah, it seemed that good men—the remnant that had not bowed the knee to Baal—were losing everything. What a blank, what a hopeless, desolate prospect lay before them, when the great prophet should have gone! Who would then uphold unpopular truth? who would then withstand powerful idolatry, inspire the evil with apprehension, and encourage and strengthen hearts that failed? It was not for himself—it was that he might be able still to do something for others,—that Elisha asked for a double portion of the prophetical spirit.

In the Church of Christ the individual counts for less than in the Jewish Church, just as in Judaism he counted for less than in Paganism. No single death could be to Christendom what Elijah's death was to the religion of Israel. Christians know that the greatness of a Paul or an Augustine is the work of the Holy Spirit, and that what He has done once, He may do again. The individual, too, whose value is so great in an imperfect and local religious system, seems insignificant when confronted with the majesty of the Universal Church: and when, in Christendom, men speak as though this and that loss were irreparable, they know not what spirit they are of. No loss is irreparable in His kingdom Who perpetually makes all things new,[1] and where the greatest or humblest of His servants are equally dependent for all that they have and are.

To most of us Elisha's prayer would be safely para-

[1] Rev. xxi. 5.

phrased, without reference to what may have been given to or withheld from others. The most essential feature of the prophetical spirit is shed abroad in Christian hearts by the Holy Ghost Which is given us. It is the sense of the Love of God:—

> "I ask not wealth, I ask not length of days,
> Nor joys which home and rural scenes bestow,
> Nor honour among men, nor poet's praise,
> Nor friendship, nor the light of love to know,
> Which with its own warm sun bathes all below:
> Nor that the seed I sow should harvest prove;
> I ask not health, nor spirit's gladdening flow,
> Nor an assured pledge of rest above,
> If only Thou wilt give a heart to know Thy love."[1]

But the value to Elisha, in after life, of that parting scene was independent of and higher than the gift which it won for him—the last solemn communications; the reply; the answer; and then no more, but the chariots of fire and the horses of fire, and the rapture into the Unseen. The elevation of the scene was beyond language; but Elisha could not refrain from the cry, "My father, my father! the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." There is nothing quite like it in sacred history. It is far above the silent removal of Enoch from earth, and far below the calm majesty of the Ascension, when no chariots of fire were needed to sweep the Risen Body of the Redeemer from the earth; when, as they beheld, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.[2] At the moment of death heaven has at times been opened to the humblest Christians, and He Who makes the flames of fire His ministers, has displayed Himself, as to Stephen,[3] ere the soul has parted from the body.

Yet in any case the outward accompaniments of the departure from this world of a great and saintly soul are far less important than the fact itself. Some who hear me

[1] *The Baptistery*, Part I., Image 5. [2] Acts i. 9. [3] *Ib.* vii. 55, 56.

may have been present at deathbeds which they will never forget. Some, very probably, will some day be present at them, and may remember what is now said to them. Few events in life are of such vital bearing on our eternal state as these high experiences. To be at the bedside of a dying Christian, to listen to his last words and join in his last prayers, to partake, it may be, in his last Communion, is to know something of Elisha's feelings beyond the Jordan, nay, something of the mind of the Apostles on the mount of the Transfiguration or on the mount of the Ascension. In such scenes Calvary and Tabor are often strangely blended: the physical suffering with the lofty and transcendental calm,—the visible break-up of the poor human framework with the spiritual illumination of the chariots of fire and horses of fire, that are already on their way from Paradise. For if so much was possible under the old law—a shadow from first to last of good things to come[1]—what may not be, what has not been, possible for Christians with whom our Lord and Saviour, Incarnate, Crucified, Interceding, is present, ready to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him?[2] To witness a Christian deathbed is to witness not a triumph of human energy, or composure, or fortitude; but a display of His invigorating grace,—the mercy and the majesty of the Redeemer, rendered visible in the peace and joy of the redeemed. Faith does not now see the chariots of fire and horses of fire; but she listens for words which, since the consecration they received on Calvary, mean infinitely more—"Into Thy Hands I commend my spirit, for Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, Thou God of Truth."[3]

[1] Heb. x. 1. [2] *Ib.* vii. 25. [3] Ps. xxxi. 6; St. Luke xxiii. 46.

SERMON XVIII.

IMPATIENCE AT THE NATURE OF RELIGIOUS TRUTH.

2 KINGS v. 11, 12.

But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call upon the Name of Jehovah his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned, and went away in a rage.

NAAMAN the Syrian, the proud noble, the brave soldier, the afflicted leper, is in these several capacities a representative man. His peers, his comrades, his fellow-sufferers may well have been proud of claiming his fellowship. But it is not these particulars which should engage the attention most urgently this afternoon. Naaman, as he waits, disappointed and indignant, before the door of Elisha's house in Samaria, represents human nature in presence of some higher truth than it has yet mastered, —in presence of Revelation ; and, from this point of view, he may be studied with no little advantage.

Let us first glance at his history. Naaman was a brave and skilful soldier. The Bible tells us that by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria ; and recently discovered inscriptions make it probable, to say the least, that he had distinguished himself in a campaign by which the Syrians of Damascus were for a considerable time freed from the oppressive power of the Assyrian kings.

The successful soldier stood high in the favour of his sovereign and in the opinion of his countrymen; but his life was embittered by the humiliating and painful disease which was so prevalent in those ages throughout the East, and in which the Israelites were taught to trace a material shadow or symbol of moral evil. Naaman's leprosy cannot have been of the severest type, or it would have interfered with his duties in the palace and the camp, duties which, it would seem, were never interrupted. Had he been an Israelite, his illness would have shut him out from all human society; but a Pagan Syrian could still hold his position as a public man, although he must have felt keenly the distress and the loathsomeness of his malady. It is plain, too, that his master, the king of Syria, felt strong sympathy with his distinguished officer, and was on the look-out for a remedy, if any could be had.

How then did Naaman, commander of the Syrian forces in Damascus, come to find himself waiting in the city of Samaria, outside the door of a prophet of God? The explanation is instructive, as showing the sort of channels along which, in all ages of the world's history, religious truth has filtered itself through the great fabric of human society; and it anticipates almost exactly what happened very frequently in the earliest days of the Christian Church. The Syrians, without being exactly at war with Israel, were on bad terms with it, ever since the failure of Ahab's expedition: and from time to time raids were made into the two territories from either side, and such booty as could be laid hands on was carried off. In one of these raids, the Syrians had carried away from her home a young Israelitish girl, who was now a slave in Naaman's palace, and in attendance upon his wife. Like Daniel, like Esther, like that late psalmist who has told us how by the waters of Babylon he sat down and wept,[1] this maiden

[1] Ps. cxxxvii. 1.

cherished a loving and tender memory of the religious blessings of her distant home. Often, no doubt, like another captive or exile, she exclaimed—

> "Why art thou so heavy, O my soul:
> And why art thou so disquieted within me?
> O put thy trust in God: for I will yet give Him thanks,
> Which is the Help of my countenance, and my God."[1]

In all ages there are persons who, without being slaves, live perforce in situations of dependence which often seem to cut them off from religious privileges and from opportunities of religious usefulness. This is often the case with governesses and, in another sense, with maid-servants among ourselves; they think it hard to have to consult the whims of a thoughtless mistress, and to pass obscure and fruitless lives. Depend upon it, where there is integrity of principle and simplicity of purpose, the time comes, sooner or later, for doing the act or saying the word which gives dignity, greatness, sanctity to every life; which redeems it altogether from being barren or commonplace. So it was with the Hebrew slave-girl in the palace of Naaman at Damascus. She saw, day by day, her master's sufferings,—uncured, and, so far as Syrian skill went, incurable. She had heard, in her young days, in her beloved home, of the prophet who had succeeded Elijah, and who now lived in great consideration and wielding great authority, in Samaria. She ventured to whisper to her mistress, in one of those moments of intimacy to which even slaves were not unfrequently admitted, that she wished her lord could see the great prophet who dwelt in Samaria, and who, she felt sure, could cure the leprosy. Her words were reported to Naaman, and he in turn repeated them to his sovereign. The king of Syria at once resolved to make the most of the suggestion. Naaman in person was ordered to leave

[1] Ps. xlii. 6, 7, 14, 15; xliii. 5, 6.

at once for Samaria: he took with him money and presents amounting to more than twelve thousand pounds of our money; and he was also the bearer of a letter to the king of Israel which requested that the leper might be cured.

The king of Israel himself was neither physician nor prophet; and he saw or chose to see in the despatch of the Syrian monarch only one of those impossible demands with which ambitious monarchs are wont to preface a declaration of war. But Naaman's arrival and message were reported to Elisha. With the freedom and authority of his great position, he rebuked Jehoram for his unbelief and his alarm. Why could not Naaman be sent on to him, that he "might learn that there was a prophet in Israel"?[1] Naaman obeyed. The great Syrian left the palace of the monarch, and he drew up, with his long line of horsemen, with his splendid war-chariot, before the humble dwelling of Elisha. He waited, expecting that the prophet, who had invited him, would at once appear. He waited; but although the prophet was within, a servant only presented himself, and that not to invite Naaman to enter the dwelling, but to bid him journey something more than thirty miles across the country, and bathe himself seven times in the stream of the Jordan. If he would do that, he would recover. It was this message which led to the outbreak of temper and language described in the text: "Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call upon the Name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned, and went away in a rage."

Here, I say, Naaman represents human nature, anxious to be blessed by God's Revelation of Himself, yet un-

[1] 2 Kings v. 8.

willing to take the blessing except on its own terms. For Naaman saw in Elisha, not merely, or chiefly, a master of the healing art, but the exponent and prophet of a religion which was, he dimly felt, higher and diviner than his own. Like the sculptor of what is called the Moabite Stone, heathen though he was, he was acquainted with the Sacred Name of Israel's God, and indeed he expected that Elisha would cure him by invoking It. Thus his bearing has a religious interest of a very high order; and his treatment of Elisha's message has been repeated, and is repeated continually, under other circumstances, by thousands upon thousands of human beings. Our business is not to judge a man who, with scanty advantages, failed in temper and judgment when dealing with a very serious subject. But his conduct, like all else in Holy Scripture, is written for our learning;[1] and we should do well to see how far he may have anticipated some of either our temptations or our actual failings, in reference to Religious Truth.

I.

In Naaman's language, then, we trace, first of all, a sense of humiliation and wrong. He feels himself slighted. He had been accustomed, at the brilliant court of Damascus, to receive a great deal of deference and consideration—more perhaps than any one, except the monarch himself. He had made a long journey into what he probably considered a vassal kingdom, and one of its religious ministers treats him as if he were in a position of clearly marked inferiority. "Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me." And Elisha's conduct cannot reasonably be ascribed to the legal prohibition of intercourse with lepers, or to any wish to magnify the

[1] Rom. xv. 4.

miracle in the eyes of Naaman, still less to any fear of infection. Elisha divined Naaman's state of mind, and he knew what was the lesson which he needed most to learn. Elisha acted as the minister of Him Who "resisteth the proud, and giveth grace unto the lowly."[1]

It is so in our own day. Here is a man who feels instinctively that Christianity can give him that which, in a lasting form, is attainable nowhere else,—purity in his heart, and peace in his soul. He has tried Syria in all its forms,—society, philosophy, pleasure, every kind of occupation; but the sore remains. He has heard that Israel's True Prophet still cures the leper, and he comes for the remedy. But he comes to Christ in an easy, confident spirit, as though he were doing the Gospel a good turn by conferring upon it the distinction of his splendid patronage. He comes for a blessing, no doubt, but then he believes himself to be giving something like an equivalent. He comes, in short, in his inmost heart to treat with our Lord as if he were a sort of equal,—not to bend utterly before Him as a repentant sinner. And the first duty which Religion has to discharge towards him is to convince him of the true state of the case. He has to be undeceived as to his own condition; he has to learn that he and all have sinned and come short of the glory of God;[2] and that if justified at all, they are justified freely by His Grace, through the Redemption that is in Christ Jesus.[3]

Christianity, my brethren, does not take a flattering view of human nature in its fallen and unregenerate condition. The three first chapters of the Epistle to the Romans stand at the portal of the fullest statement of our Lord's redemptive work which we have in the New Testament. And when men are going about to establish their own natural righteousness, not submitting them-

[1] St. Pet. v. 5. [2] Rom. iii. 23. [3] *Ib.* 24.

selves to the righteousness of God;[1] when they are forgetting or slurring over the moral evil which has established a barrier between themselves and the All-Holy; when they would deal with Christianity as if it were only a philosophy, truer and more comprehensive than other philosophies, but not entitled to set up a tribunal within their conscience, or to investigate the secrets of their hearts, then the message is sent out to them, "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods; . . . and knowest not that thou art miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and to anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten."[2]

II.

We see, secondly, in Naaman's language, the demand which human nature often makes for something sensational in religion. Naaman expected an interview with the prophet, full of dramatic and striking incidents. He knew how the priests and magicians in Syria would probably have acted, had they possessed Elisha's power. They would have set it off by all the arts that could impress the imagination. "I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the Name of Jehovah his God, and move his hand up and down over the place, and recover the leprosy." Instead of this, how tame, and prosaic, and business-like is the proceeding! Naaman, the great prince and soldier, is put off with a curt message; he is told, as any peasant might be told, to bathe seven times in the public stream of the Jordan—a proceeding

[1] Rom. x. 3. [2] Rev. iii. 17-19.

open to all the world besides. If the prophet had bidden him attempt some great thing—something corresponding to what he believed to be the general proportions of his station and character, something verging upon the limits of the superhuman and the impossible—would he not have done, or tried to do it? Of course he would. But to drive some thirty miles across the hills in order to bathe in the national river of Israel at the end of his drive—the proposal was too commonplace: it was simply intolerable!

Here too Naaman is human nature in all countries and all times. The striking, the impressive, the sensational, are as much in request here and now as they were in Elisha's day at Samaria. A man is feeling his way towards practical Christianity. He has lived on excitement all his life, and he expects to find that which will gratify it, although in another shape, at the door of the Church. It is a sort of necessity of his nature; and if he is not greeted by something exceptional and brilliant, he is quite prepared to go away in a rage. And he is almost necessarily disappointed. "I thought," he says, that He Whom I am seeking to cure me of my leprosy would surely come out to me, presenting Himself in some splendid literature, in some world-wide, undivided, spotless Church, proclaiming truth by voices of matchless eloquence, inviting to worship by ceremonies of graceful and imposing magnificence. Yet what is the case? The world which I have left does better: and after my experience of its charms I find the Church tame and insipid. Compare its hesitating utterances with the freedom, the resource, the bold and fearless impetuosity of secular genius, lavishing itself over the fields of poetry and philosophy, and taking the human mind captive by its many-sided attractiveness. Compare its feeble, tentative, unconcerted, often disorganised and

self-neutralising action, with the decision and power which characterises the work of great worldly powers and representative statesmen. Nay, how little do its most characteristic rites respond to the first expectations of the human soul! It is a hard thing, when a man is waiting to be touched by the fire of a prophet's utterance, that he should be sent, in an official way, to bathe seven times in Jordan. It is hard, when a man is expecting some new and brilliant theory that shall take account in its majestic compass of all the facts that disturb the relations of religion and philosophy, to be told simply, in the old way, that the Blood of Atonement and the Water of Baptism are necessary and efficacious now as at the first." So men speak; and it is Naaman's voice—the voice of human nature—which expects contact with Revealed Religion to be necessarily exciting and sensational.

No doubt at times true Religion does meet this craving of our nature. They who witnessed the Transfiguration, or the Ascension, or the Tongues of Fire on the Day of Pentecost; they who heard St. Paul on the strand at Miletus, or who listened to the speakers in mystic languages at Corinth, or who in the first fervour of their conversion would have plucked out their own eyes, and given them to the Apostle who had brought them to Christ, must have felt its power. And again and again, in the later ages of Christendom, vast enthusiasms have swept over Christian populations, and Elisha has come out to the door of his house, and has passed his hand over the moral sins of society, and recovered the leper. But, as a rule, the strength of Revealed Religion is seen in its power of dispensing with efforts of this kind. Its force resides, not in the earthquake, nor in the fire, but in the still small voice of conscience. The power of producing great sensations is no test of truth or goodness. The power of controlling passion and quickening conscience is such a test. But

this is achieved in quietness and confidence; in the discharge of routine duties; in the formation and strengthening of quiet but deep convictions; in that inner life of affection for our Lord, which risks its excellence by rude exposure and eager demonstrativeness. An early Communion, where ten or twelve assemble in the twilight to receive the Sacrament of the Divine Redemption, is likely to be much more useful than an exciting evening sermon in a crowded church.

III.

Once more, Naaman represents prejudiced attachment to early associations, coupled with a jealous impatience of anything like exclusive claims put forward on behalf of the truths or ordinances of a Religion which we are for the first time attentively considering. Naaman will forget the prophet's disappointing reserve; his mind glances for a moment at his command. He is to bathe in some distant stream, and the leprosy will disappear. Will not the rivers of his native Syria suffice—the clear, cool stream of the Abana or Barada, rushing down from Anti-Libanus, and forming the oasis on which Damascus is built; or, farther to the south, the Pharpar or Awaj, flowing through the plain into the desert lake Heljâny? If the cure is to depend upon any such condition, why will not these historic waters achieve the work? why must he be asked to bathe in that turbid and muddy brook which he had passed on the road to Samaria, and which was bound up with the history of an alien race? "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them and be clean?"

My brethren, few things can be more precious than early associations, when we have been nurtured in a Christian home, and memory treasures up actions and

persons on whom Christ our Lord has shed the Light of His Countenance. It is otherwise when this unspeakable blessing has been denied us, and the heart has given its freshest and its best to that which is erroneous or wrong. Then there is a struggle at the door of Elisha's house, if we ever get there; and men ask why Grace, of which they know so little, is after all so efficacious and so necessary? and why Nature, of which they may or may not really know more, cannot do the work of cleansing man from his defilement? Look at Nature, they say, look at its grace, its freedom, its resource—can it be the impotent thing you say? Has it not points of superiority to the hard, stiff, formal teaching of your theologians? Are not the green fields better than the close air and dingy aspect of your churches? Is not a good library of general literature, or a brilliant conversation, or a scientific lecture, more to the purpose than your dull and uninteresting sermons? Why are we to believe that your Sacraments are the especial channels of any regenerative efficacy—that a little water and a few prescribed words can make "a member of Christ, a child of God, and an heir of the kingdom of heaven," according to the teaching of your Catechism? High intellectual gifts, great moral ascendency—these things may compass the regeneration of the world; for the rest, it has been said that a good national literature is much more to the purpose than all or any of the gifts of Christ.

Nature, no doubt, my brethren, can do much; all that is great, beautiful, productive in it comes, like the gifts of grace, from God, the Fountain of all goodness; but it can no more rise above its own level than can water. It can civilise—that is one thing: it cannot regenerate—that is quite another. He Who made us can alone remake us; and He is free to choose the channel of this His choicest gift. He might have made the Syrian waters the means

of His healing power; He might have denied any efficacy to the waters of the Jordan. There was, in truth, no physical quality inherent in the Jordan water which wrought the cure; the cure was wrought by the Divine Will connecting Its efficacy with this particular instrument. Of themselves, neither Syrian nor Jewish stream had any healing properties at all; but by a particular choice God made the Jewish stream the means whereby His healing power was to be dispensed to Naaman. The question is not whether man's natural life, in thought and action, has not a force and splendour of its own;—of course it has. The question is whether anything in it can render unnecessary and superfluous that stupendous act of Power and Love which was achieved on Mount Calvary. Of itself, a little water applied to a child's forehead, while a few words are repeated at the moment, could not possibly convey a spiritual gift; to suppose this would be to believe in a material charm. But if, choosing this out of a thousand possible acts or symbols, He to Whom all power is given on earth and in heaven,[1] has indeed attached to it a high spiritual efficacy, the case is very different. Nature may be in itself more graceful, more fertile, more persuasive; but she is comparatively powerless, because she lacks that which gives power to what in themselves are weak and beggarly elements:[2] she lacks the chartered presence of the world's One Redeemer,—the presence of Christ.

IV.

But to go to the root of the matter. Naaman's fundamental mistake consisted in his attempting to decide at all how the prophet should work the miracle of his cure. He plainly had no real means of doing this. He only knew,

[1] St. Matt. xxviii. 18. [2] Gal. iv. 9.

or had reason to suppose, that the religion of Israel was higher, more powerful, more Divine than his own. He came to it for that which his own could not give him; and he, a suppliant and a leper, was in no position to determine what would or would not be becoming and appropriate action or advice in its ministers. If it did its work, if he obtained the cure he needed, that would be enough: to decide upon its methods of procedure was beyond his powers. How often is this fundamental mistake repeated! Men who know themselves to be lepers, who have lived all their lives far beyond the frontier of the Christian Church, and who, at last, through God's mercy, have come to it for that which neither civilisation nor culture can give,—who have come, it may be, thus far, at considerable sacrifices, with their ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment,—men who have discovered that a Jehoram, a mere worldly compromise with religion, cannot help them, and have pushed on resolutely to the door of Elisha,—yet strangely conceive themselves able to determine what their Benefactor ought to do in order to be able to achieve their cure. Christian evidences, they say, ought to be mathematical; moral evidence will not suffice. Christian doctrine must include these elements and exclude those. Christian worship must be the exaggeration of slovenliness or the exaggeration of ceremony, as the case may be. Christian philanthropy must make a compact with their political economy; Christian philosophy must make a treaty with this or that writer who is at issue with its first postulates; Christian morals must have an eye to details, and yet must avoid becoming casuistry; and Christianity, as a whole, must respond to their expectations without violently exceeding them. In short, Christ must come out to meet the man, and stand and move His Hand over the place, and recover the leper.

Do I say that Naaman has no duties but submission; that there are no conditions with which a religion, claiming to come from God, must comply in order to claim the allegiance of the human soul? Apart from the evidences which have led a man to faith, there are two tests of a true Revelation which cannot be dispensed with. It must not contradict the best voice of natural conscience; and it must not contradict itself. Our sense of moral truth is just as much God's voice as God's revelation; and He cannot unsay what He has already told us. Our conscience, of course, may be misinformed: we must look to that. But if, for instance, it were true that the doctrine of the Atonement contradicted a true idea of justice,—not of justice between creature and creature, but of justice between the creature and the Creator,—that would be a reason for doubting it. And if we are told that a series of teachers, who, unless history is worthless, contradict each other on important points, are all equally infallible, that certainly is a reason for distrusting the system which makes the assertion. But, beyond this, in the purely spiritual and supernatural sphere, we are not able to say beforehand what a religion coming from God ought to do or to be like. The finite cannot measure the Infinite or His work; and to attempt to do so is to be exposed, sooner or later, to the shock of disappointment. A German poet lashes the writers of his day, who practically say, "What I would have done had I been the Christ."[1] An Apostle, when he closes his account of the dispensation of mercy, exclaims, "O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God; how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!"[2]

Naaman, we know, thought better of it, and after his recovery showed that he had a grateful and simple heart

[1] Claudius. [2] Rom. xi. 33.

by returning to Samaria and making his acknowledgments to Elisha, and his profession of faith in Elisha's God. And the general lesson of his history is plain.

We are lepers, needing the healing virtue of our Lord and Saviour, however, wherever, through whomsoever, He may bestow it. We know that the true Prophet of all time heals souls in the midst of Israel; we know that His Blood cleanses and His Spirit sanctifies, and that there are appointed channels of His grace and power. If we are satisfied that the general evidence for this revelation of love and mercy is sufficient to live by and to rest upon in life and death, do not let us dream of improving upon His work in detail, of requiring or creating new organs of infallibility, or of depreciating old and assured means of sharing His redemptive grace. It is unpractical as well as irreverent to discuss what has been settled by the Infinite Wisdom, and settled irrevocably. The true scope of our activity is to make the most of His Bounty and His Love, that by His healing and strengthening grace we may so pass through things temporal as finally not to lose the things eternal.

SERMON XIX.

GEHAZI'S SIN.

2 KINGS v. 25.

But Gehazi went in, and stood before his master: and Elisha said unto him, Whence comest thou, Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went no whither.

THE pages of the Bible describe a great many lies; but no one lie more complete and deliberate than this which Gehazi told Elisha. Let us endeavour to consider it in as practical a spirit as may be, this afternoon; since, human nature being what it is, the subject is never without present and immediate interest.

I.

And, first of all, we will remind ourselves of the preceding and surrounding circumstances, as they are recorded in the first lesson for this morning.[1]

Naaman, the Syrian general, had risen at the court of Damascus to a position of the very first importance. He had, in all probability, distinguished himself in the war of independence against Assyria, which, as we know from recently discovered inscriptions, had been carried on by the Syrians of Damascus some few years before, and had been brought to a successful issue. Naaman, however, though a great soldier, was a leper: his leprosy seems to have been of that lighter kind, which did not disable a

[1] The Morning of the Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity.

man for the discharge of many public duties. Still, any man in his position would have been thankful to be cured of a painful and humiliating disease; and in Naaman's household there was a slave-girl who was both able and willing to help him. She was, by birth, an Israelite, who had been carried away from her home by the wild Syrian cavalry, in one of the raids which were then made at intervals into the territory of Israel; and she was now in the service of Naaman's wife. She one day expressed to her mistress a wish that her master could meet Elisha, the great prophet in Samaria; the leprosy, she thought, would soon be cured, if this only could be arranged. Her words were reported to the Syrian king, who sent Naaman himself with a letter of introduction to the reigning king of Israel, Jehoram; and, as was usual in the East, a present—consisting of a large sum of money, and two complete suits of dress. Jehoram was asked to effect, somehow, Naaman's cure; the Syrian king probably meant that Jehoram was to bid the prophet, as his subject, to work the necessary miracle. But Jehoram had no serious belief in the mission and power of Elisha; he looked at Elisha, as men of the world often regard a powerful religious influence, with quaint alternations of cynicism and uneasiness, but without any such trust and sympathy as would enable him to apply to Elisha for counsel or assistance. In point of fact, Jehoram saw in the Syrian king's letter only an attempt to create a pretext for a new war, by preferring a request which he could not himself grant. In his alarm and agitation, Jehoram rent his clothes, an act which, in the East, when it did not express mourning for the dead, implied the greatest distress and perplexity of mind: and Elisha, on hearing of this occurrence, reproached the king of Israel for his forgetfulness that God had a prophet in Israel; and desired that Naaman might be sent on to himself.

The great Syrian came; he came as he was bid: his splendid equipages drew up before the humble cottage in which the prophet lived. Elisha deemed it well to teach him of how little account this world's magnificence may be in the eyes of a spiritual man. Elisha did not even go out to the door to see his illustrious visitor: he merely sent a message to the effect that Naaman was to wash seven times in the sacred waters of the Jordan, and then he would be cured.

Naaman was offended both with the substance of the message, and with the way in which he had been treated. Naaman had pictured to himself Elisha working a miracle then and there, in an imposing way: "I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand and call out on the Name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper." As to going to wash in the foreign and Jewish river—the notion was intolerable. Why could not the Syrian streams do just as well—the Abana and the Pharpar which watered the fields and gardens of Damascus? The prophet's conduct and his message combined were simply insulting.

Naaman was very angry. But the leprosy was as bad as ever; and time passes: and as time passes, passion cools. Naaman's trusted slaves pointed out to him that, after all, he was not asked to do very much. If he had been enjoined to attempt some great duty, they said, he would have at once obeyed. Why should he hesitate, when obedience was so simple and so easy?

Naaman did obey. The sevenfold washing in the sacred waters of the Jordan did its work. Naaman's flesh came again as the flesh of a little child: he was clean.

Then it was that, in his gratitude and his joy, Naaman paid his second visit to the prophet Elisha. He came, not merely to thank the prophet for the counsel which had

proved to be so wise, but also to announce his own conversion from Paganism to Israel's faith in the One True God. "I know," he said, "that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel."[1] He begged Elisha to receive a valuable present of dress and money: but Elisha steadily declined. Then after a few words as to the conduct he might rightly pursue when waiting on his royal master in his heathen home, Naaman took his leave of the great prophet, rejoicing in his recovered health of body, but rejoicing even more, we may believe, in his knowledge of Him Who is the true Source of all blessings, whether of body or soul.

Naaman was gone; but one person at least, who had witnessed the scene, was not well pleased. As Elisha's servant, Gehazi, no doubt, was well satisfied that Naaman should be cured of his disease, and that he should be converted to the faith of Israel. But then, it was only reasonable that he should pay for these advantages; and in Gehazi's opinion, a great opportunity had been lost. It was not, however, too late to repair the mistake, at least to some extent, by relieving Naaman of part of his treasure. Gehazi, accordingly, set out in pursuit of him. Naaman showed the high honour in which he held Elisha, by lighting down from his chariot to receive Elisha's servant, and the message which, presumably, the prophet's servant bore. Gehazi explained that two young students from one of the two schools of the prophets in Ephraim had arrived on a visit to Elisha; that these young men wanted money and clothes; and that Elisha now would be glad to accept a talent of silver and two suits of clothing. This was indeed much less than Naaman had originally offered to give: but Gehazi could not have asked for more without exciting Naaman's suspicion that something was wrong. Naaman begged Gehazi by all

[1] 2 Kings v. 15.

means to take two talents instead of one; and so Gehazi returned with his ill-gotten spoils. He took the precaution of stopping beyond a hill close to Elisha's house, which, it seems, shut out the view of the Damascus road: he then dismissed Naaman's servants, who had carried his packages, lest they should attract his master's eye; and then, after stowing his treasures away in some room or cupboard of the prophet's dwelling, he went, and, as is the wont of Eastern servants, stood before Elisha, looking as if nothing in particular had happened since Naaman's departure.

If Gehazi thought that he could escape detection, he was soon undeceived. The old man looked up at him, and asked him where he had been. Gehazi ventured to say that he had been nowhere. And then the prophet delayed no longer. He had marked Gehazi's act, and he knew his motives. Gehazi had thought himself alone: but Elisha had accompanied him in the prophetic spirit at that critical moment when Naaman alighted from his chariot on the Damascus road. Gehazi thought that at least his intentions were sufficiently secret; but Elisha, by his reference to "oliveyards and vineyards, and sheep and oxen, and men-servants and maid-servants,"[1] showed that he had read the projects of social splendour which, as Gehazi fondly hoped, might be realised by the aid of Naaman's wealth. There was a stern justice in the penalty that followed. Naaman's leprosy should go along with his wealth; in grasping at the one, Gehazi had inherited the other! Already the foul disease was upon him: "He went out from Elisha's presence a leper, as white as snow."[2]

[1] 2 Kings v. 26. [2] *Ib.* 27.

II.

Gehazi's punishment is startling: but its justice will be more apparent if we proceed to consider what it was in Gehazi's conduct which led up to his lie, and which, from his point of view, made it necessary for him to tell it.

1. Gehazi's conduct, then, involved first of all a violation of the trust which his master had reposed in him.

Confidence is to society what cement is to a high building: it holds all together. From the necessity of the case we all of us place confidence in some persons,—whether our elders or our children, whether our superiors or our servants, whether those from whom we learn, or those whom we trust not to abuse the information with which we furnish them. And from the necessity of the case, no less, we all of us—until we have by some great crime forfeited our relations to society altogether—are the objects and recipients of confidence on the part of others: often of a great deal more confidence than we at all suspect, or than we deserve to have reposed in us. Confidence is the venture which every human being has to make in dealing with other human beings around him. Confidence is the honour, the high and ennobling honour, which in some degree every human being receives at the hands of his fellows, and which associates him so far with That Highest Power and Goodness, to which, in the last resort, we all commit our destinies and our lives. All our occupations in life, all our relations with each other, depend for their wellbeing upon the maintenance of confidence. And to justify confidence on the one hand, and to learn to place confidence largely in other men on the other, are essential conditions of every department of a man's public work. Nowhere is this better understood than in London, the mistress and centre of the com-

merce of the world. The conditions upon which trade is conducted are so largely, as we say, artificial, that a shock to confidence is felt to be a disaster of grave importance, and a violation of confidence a crime which can be with difficulty, if at all, atoned for by the offender. And this is not a matter of arbitrary or human arrangement; it belongs to the very structure of human society; it is the way in which one department of the Law of God makes itself felt to be essential, even here and now, to the well-being of man. Confidence, I say, as vital to the wellbeing of society, is just as much God's appointment and work as the due action of the heart, as vital to the wellbeing of the human body, is His appointment and work. And society is guided by a true instinct when resenting and punishing a violation of confidence, even with a severity which may at first sight appear to be violent or excessive.

Gehazi, then, was an offender against the obligations of confidence: for he was not merely Elisha's servant, he was also, to a great extent, his trusted companion—I might almost say, his partner. Consider the part assigned to Gehazi in Elisha's dealings with the good Shunammite. On two occasions Elisha sends Gehazi to this distinguished lady; and it is Gehazi who makes the suggestion that she is childless, and so leads the prophet to promise her a son;[1] it is Gehazi who is sent on before the prophet and the sorrowing mother to lay Elisha's staff upon the face of the dead child;[2] it is Gehazi who, in after years, when the Shunammite was claiming her property at the hands of the king of Israel, describes in glowing terms the deeds of the master from whose presence he was now banished for the remainder of his days.[3]

Yes, when it was all too late, Gehazi could feel what had been the honour of association with this great teacher, with this lofty and saintly character,—with this man who,

[1] 2 Kings iv. 14. [2] *Ib.* 29-31. [3] *Ib.* viii. 5.

in his simple and austere life, had such power with God that Pagans as well as Israelites, kings and statesmen as well as men of the people, trembled and bowed before him. It was association with such a man, and this alone, which gave Gehazi a position; to be Elisha's servant was of itself a privileged post of commanding influence. We have already seen how the Syrian general acknowledged it. To be associated with Elisha in his work, to share his sympathies, and to a certain extent his counsels; to know what never could have been known but for this high companionship, would have been felt by a man with even the natural sense of honour to impose great obligations. Accordingly, when Gehazi had once so far yielded to his covetous desires as to go after Naaman, his conscience told him that he had done an act which his sense of honour condemned. To use the great position which his relation to Elisha had secured to him, for a purpose which he knew Elisha would have disallowed: to employ the knowledge, the experience, the influence with other men, which such an intimacy conferred, in order to compass an end which he dared not acknowledge to the master whose generous confidence had made him what he was—this was to do what the Pagans of Damascus in their better moments would have shrunk from doing. Gehazi could hardly stop there. We have heard, perhaps, of some clerk in a public office, or in a great mercantile house, who has sold information to which his position gave him access, with the result of enriching himself considerably, but to the embarrassment or serious loss of his employers. No man having committed an act like that can say that he will go no further. He may well have no choice. The man who has acted against his sense of right is on the brink of speaking against his sense of truth. Gehazi had to choose between lying and humiliation; and when he had brought himself to prefer two talents of silver and two

changes of raiment to the love and trust of his friend and patron, there was not much doubt what his choice would be.

2. Why was Gehazi's act so wrong in the eyes of Elisha? Because it involved a serious injury to the cause of true religion.

What is said of our Lord and Saviour by the aged Simeon in the *Nunc Dimittis* was in a measure true of the religion of Israel also. It had a double aspect: it was "prepared before the face of all people; to be a light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of God's people."[1] When St. Paul wishes to mark the degradation of the Jews of his time, he quotes a warning which, in slightly different terms, had been given by Nathan to David, and by Isaiah and Ezekiel to the men of their day: "The Name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you."[2] Israel had duties to the heathen: not the great duty which is laid upon the Church of Christ, of bringing them all, as quickly and surely as may be, into the True Fold; but the duty of letting them at least see that there was a lamp of truth burning in the hearts of the chosen people, by which, if they would, they might read God's best lessons about themselves and about Him in nature and history. In Elisha's eyes the main interest of Naaman's visit was, not that it was calculated to establish friendly political relations between Israel and Syria —so long estranged; nor yet that it had resulted in a bodily cure which, from the eminence of the patient, could not but be famous throughout the neighbouring countries; but that it had, and was likely to have, important results on the progress of true religion. Naaman, as we have seen, was, in effect, converted to faith in One True God: and therefore everything that was likely to strengthen or weaken him in the religion of his choice

[1] St. Luke ii. 31, 32.

[2] Rom. ii. 24; 2 Sam. xii. 14; Is. lii. 5; Ezek. xxxvi. 20, 23.

was, in Elisha's eyes, of great importance,—an importance altogether distinct in kind from that of any political or social events whatever.

And here it was that conduct like Gehazi's was likely to act so disastrously. Elisha had been careful to refuse all and any of the splendid presents which Naaman offered. If Naaman was to carry back with him a sound body, and, what was better, a soul illuminated by Divine truth, Elisha was determined that these great blessings should not be associated in his mind with the details of a commercial transaction. God's great gifts in grace should resemble His gifts in nature: in being bestowed with an open-handed generosity. The heathen were to come to the waters of salvation, as to the waters of healing, without money and without price.[1] But Gehazi's act, as it presented itself to Naaman, must have had all the appearance of an after-thought on the prophet's part—which would be fatal to the first and high idea of the prophet's disinterestedness. It may well have seemed to Naaman as if Elisha had repented of his first large-heartedness; as if he had originally declined the presents from an impulsive enthusiasm which could not last; as if the prophet of the True God was, after all, like the rest of mankind in looking upon the high gifts of Heaven as having a marketable value, just like any of the wares that were exposed for sale in the bazaars of Damascus. Elisha foresaw this result as too likely to follow upon his servant's act: he foresaw the cynical recoil, perhaps the ruin or apostasy of the recent, perhaps still hesitating, convert: and hence his question to Gehazi, "Is this a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and men-servants and maid-servants?"[2]

We may be sure that Gehazi's conscience was suffi-

[1] Isa. lv. 1. [2] 2 Kings v. 26.

ciently enlightened by association with Elisha to have anticipated and entered into Elisha's feeling on the subject: and this would have been a second and yet more powerful reason for concealment. For Gehazi would hardly have tried to persuade himself that, after all, he was not a prophet; and that a high view of duty which would have been becoming in his master, was not necessary in him.

It is the modern conscience which indulges in these refinements upon the broad responsibilities of a position in life. Those who are associated with God's work in some capacity less than the most responsible, are yet, in their degree, answerable for the success of that work, and are bound to do nothing that can hinder or injure it. Not ordained clergymen only, but those who are connected with them by family ties, as wives, or daughters, and those who, without being ordained, take part in the service of the Church, in choirs, or schools, or works of charity, are answerable for the effect of their conduct and bearing on men who are without any religion, but who perhaps are seeking one. Inconsistencies, or worse, on the part of those who are associated with the work of Christ in the world, although not actually consecrated to promote it—inconsistencies of which little is thought by those who are guilty of them—may too easily be taken by others as the measure of the practical worth of the Christian Creed, and may have the effect of driving an inquirer back into the desert, when he was already almost within sight of the towers of Jerusalem. It is not the clergy alone who have to remember that there are things better worth living and working for than the two talents of silver and two changes of raiment that can be filched from the world.

III.

It was, then, Gehazi's sense of the character of his act in following after Naaman which led him into deliberate sin against the law of truth. He had indeed found it necessary to deceive as soon as he began to do wrong. There is a nexus between one sin and another, just as there is a nexus between one virtue and another. A man cannot stop his boat at will in the strong currents just above Niagara, though he might have avoided them altogether. Gehazi's fiction about the needs of the two imaginary students from the schools of the prophets; his dismissal of Naaman's servants while under the cover of the hill, which hid the proceeding from Elisha's eye;—these were the preliminary stages of falsehood by which Gehazi's conscience was fatally and surely hardened, up to the point of declaring before his master that he had not been out in pursuit of Naaman at all.

Here, as almost always, we remark the blindness of sin: blindness in the midst of ingenuity and contrivance. No one can have known better than Gehazi that Elisha knew a great deal that was going on beyond the range of his eyesight. Even the slaves of the king of Syria said to their master that Elisha repeated to the king of Israel the words that the Syrian king uttered in his bedchamber.[1] Gehazi had had large opportunities of taking the measure of Elisha's powers; yet he set to work as if Elisha could know nothing that he did not see with his bodily eyes. This was the point of the reproachful question, "Went not my heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee?"[2] It was folly; but it is folly of which almost every criminal trial affords a fresh example: sin blinds men to the real circumstances with

[1] 2 Kings vi. 12. [2] *Ib.* v. 26.

which they have to deal, and, above all, it destroys their power of apprehending the Presence and Omniscience of God. What Gehazi thought of Elisha, all sinners, with much less reason, think about Almighty God. "Tush, the Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it."[1] The wasted ingenuities of a diseased or violated conscience, culminating first in outrageous falsehood, and then in conspicuous disgrace, are quite in order.

Gehazi's punishment seems severe; but it marks a fact which we do well to remember:—that the injury which a deliberate falsehood inflicts on the moral nature is, in this life, irreparable. I do not say that a lie may not be forgiven: that would be to limit God's Mercy in Christ. Nor do I say that a habit of truthfulness may not be restored: that would be to limit the efficacy of God's Grace in Jesus Christ. But when the lie has been pardoned, and the habit of truth re-established, the effect of the lie still remains. The shock which it has inflicted on the fibres of the moral nature issues in a permanent weakness, which shows itself when any demand or strain is put upon high principle. A man who has told a very deliberate lie (I do not speak of any form or degree of involuntary falsehood) is like a man who has lost one lung. He may get on pretty well so long as over-exposure or over-exertion do not tax his resources. He is of the nature of a moral invalid, and there is no saying when or how his constitution may not give way.

Gehazi's leprosy expressed this: it was a visible symbol of the moral and inward fact—the fact that Gehazi's moral nature was permanently damaged. Gehazi could not be again as he was: he must carry with him to his grave the brand of humiliation and weakness. He could not, either as a liar or as a leper, live with Elisha: the

[1] Ps. xciv. 7.

latter was forbidden by the ritual law, the former was inconsistent with the rule of every good Israelite's household: "There shall no deceitful person dwell in my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight."[1] So he went forth to mourn for a lifetime the folly and wickedness which had led him to throw away the confidence and companionship of so good and great a master.

IV.

Gehazi's fall teaches us three practical lessons.

One is, to keep our desires in order if we mean to keep out of grave sin. As St. James says, "Lust, or desire, when it hath conceived, bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."[2] That is the order of growth in evil; and the practical rule is therefore *obsta principiis*,—put a stop to the process, if you can, at the very beginning. If Gehazi had not cast longing eyes upon the Syrian's wealth, he would never have entered on the series of acts which culminated in his great lie and in his lifelong leprosy. If Christ is to reign over our hands and tongues, He must be enthroned, first of all, by His Spirit, in those hearts out of which, in His absence, evil desires are ever flowing

A second lesson is the danger of thinking that great religious advantages of themselves protect us against grievous sins. The illusion is common; but experience, in all ages, contradicts it. What religious advantages in that day could be greater than Gehazi's? Naaman, while still a Pagan, could have told Gehazi that a lie is moral degradation: and the high aspirations for a new religious life in the court and people of Israel, which Gehazi would have often heard from his master, may have led him to think that he too himself lived in a moral atmosphere, in

[1] Ps. ci. 10. [2] St. James i. 15.

which attention to the simplest and primary rules of good living might be taken for granted. A lofty ideal like the Sermon on the Mount does not oblige those who have it before their eyes to be true even to virtues which the heathen honoured. The grace of the Holy Spirit and of the Christian Sacraments does not put force upon reluctant wills, or compel us to practise even natural goodness, if we are not so minded. What can be more distressing than the spectacle of men whose education and friendships and work, and at times, it may be, whose sincere efforts have pointed to the higher standards of the Gospel, and who yet, in presence of temptation, have fallen below that which is required by men of the world? "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." [1]

The last lesson is the priceless value of truthfulness in the soul's life. No advantages whatever, whether of mind, body, or estate, can counterbalance the misery of indifference to truth. No faults, however grave, are irreparable, when the soul still clings to a love of truth. Truthfulness is the basis of all other natural virtues in the soul: it is the basis of all true religion. Courage, justice, temperance, what are these but products of the sense of truth, dictating the forms of virtuous effort which are required by different circumstances? It is the sense of truth, no less than the Apostle, which tells us that "if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us; but if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." [2] It is the sense of truth which bids us pray for God's pardoning mercy in Christ Jesus:—we know what we are as sinners. It is the sense of truth which leads us to seek God's Grace from His Holy Spirit and in His Sacraments:—we know our weakness when left to ourselves. Truth is the one condition of all moral and religious progress. It were indeed better, in the old

[1] 1 Cor. x. 12. [2] 1 St. John i. 8, 9.

Greek phrase, even to perish in the light, rather than to miss truth; but, as matters stand, we Christians know that "if we walk in the light, as God is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the Blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin."[1]

[1] 1 St. John i. 7.

SERMON XX.

THE YOUNG MAN IN DOTHAN.

2 KINGS vi. 17.

And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.

THOSE of us who read our Bibles least carefully must have observed the remarkable number and character of the miracles which cluster round the lives of Elijah and Elisha. There is nothing like it in the case of any other prophet, if perhaps we except Daniel. And the reason is not difficult to see. Great outbursts of the miraculous, attesting God's energetic presence at particular times and places, appear to recur in sacred history in cycles—when truth has to be announced, promulgated afresh, or saved from extinction. One such there was in the days of Moses, when Israel was delivered from Egypt, and the faith of Sinai proclaimed; another in those of Joshua, when the Promised Land was taken possession of; another in the time we are considering, the time of Elijah and Elisha, when the belief and law of Sinai were threatened with extinction by the apostasy of the court of Israel and the attacks of the powerful Syrian monarchy; another during the Babylonish Captivity, when Israel sat down and wept over the memories of Sion by the waters of the heathen Exile. A last great display of miraculous power was in the days of the Incarnate Son of God,

Jesus Christ, and His Apostles,—the days in which God, Who had "at sundry times and in divers manners spoken in times past unto the fathers by the prophets," spoke finally and fully in His Son,[1]—the epoch of His largest and last unveiling of His Nature and Will to us, the intelligent and moral creatures of His Hand.

The miracles belonging to these different periods are unlike each other up to a certain point. Each period has, so to express it, its own characteristic miracles. But, on the other hand, there is likeness between them, arising from their common object and purpose, which cannot be mistaken. Not to go beyond our text, this miracle of Elisha's is peculiarly evangelical: it is just such a miracle as befits the drift and purpose of the Gospel, considered as an unveiling of a higher world to man. It especially anticipates such miracles of our Lord's as that by which He healed the man born blind;[2] in which at one and the same time He gave the gift of natural sight and the higher gift of spiritual sight,—the lower gift being at once a type and earnest of the higher.

I.

Let us briefly recall the circumstances under which this miracle was worked.

Elisha was on good terms with Jehoram, then king of Israel; and Jehoram was at war, as his father and grandfather had been before him, with the Syrians of Damascus, the inveterate enemies of the kingdom of Israel. The Syrians, at this later period, seem to have carried on the war by a system of predatory incursions into the territory of Israel: and on several occasions Elisha warned King Jehoram of the place which the Syrians intended to surround, and by thus putting him on his guard, enabled

[1] Heb. i. 1, 2. [2] St. John ix. 1-38.

him to escape, or at any rate to defeat the measures of the enemy. The king of Syria suspected that a failure which occurred so often must be due to some treachery on the part of his own officers; but on his making inquiry they told him that the prophet Elisha possessed such powers as to be able to keep the king of Israel informed of the Syrian king's most secret plans: "The prophet that is in Israel telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber."[1] The Syrian king hereupon resolved to capture the prophet, if possible; and with this view sent a large body of troops by night to surround Dothan, a small town some twelve Roman miles north of Samaria, where Elisha was then residing. When Elisha's servant went out in the morning, and found that the town was completely invested by the Syrians, he returned to his master in despair. Escape seemed impossible. "Alas, my lord! what shall we do?"[2] Elisha quieted him by saying that he should not fear, since "those that are with us are more than those that are with them."[3] This statement must have at first seemed absurd to the servant, who compared the few Israelites shut up in the small town with the numerous Syrian army outside it. But Elisha prayed the Lord to open his servant's eyes, that he might see something more than the world of sense,—the world above, around, beyond it. The servant accordingly beheld a repetition of Jacob's vision, who, when threatened with danger from Esau, had seen a double army of angels encamped around himself.[4] "The Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."[5]

What is meant by "the opening of the eyes of the young man"? It was not the gift of natural sight, since

[1] 2 Kings vi. 12. [2] *Ib.* 15. [3] *Ib.* 16.
[4] Gen. xxxii. 1, 2. [5] 2 Kings vi. 17.

he saw the Syrian host round Dothan, and was terrified. It was a higher gift, analogous probably to clairvoyance, —a supernatural ecstasy, which laid open to him for the time being, as to St. John in Patmos, the world of spirits, under such form as his intelligence could bear. The same thing had occurred in an earlier age to Balaam. His eyes, we are told, were opened: and he saw an angel stopping his path, an angel whom his natural eye had not seen.[1] It was the gift of a new and more piercing sense reaching into a sphere of being previously out of reach. It was like a natural discovery by the aid of a powerful telescope: the discovery of a planet unseen before, but of the existence of which an astronomer is certain by calculations which cannot fail him. Elisha's servant knew full well, as a truth of his religion, that there were such beings as angels. God, at Elisha's prayer, gave him a new power of spiritual sight; and he saw them.

What did he see? "He saw, and, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire round about Elisha." The chariots and horses are not here, as in the account of the ascent of Elijah, vehicles for a glorious passage to heaven: but symbols of the Divine power and protection. But in both passages the highest intelligences take a shape, like the forms in Ezekiel, which imply that their true nobility is service. The immaterial spirits become cognisable by the servant of Elisha, under forms of active power best calculated to reassure him. Fire is the symbol of the Godhead, as being the most ethereal of the earthly elements: the gift of Pentecost sat as tongues of fire on the Apostles;[2] God is a consuming Fire;[3] the seraph is properly the "burning spirit"; the horses and chariots mean warlike force. Still, what the servant sees is not a material, but a spiritual reality—taking a form which assured him of God's sure protection through the agency of

[1] Numb. xxii. 31. [2] Acts ii. 3, 4. [3] Heb. xii. 29.

those ministers of His who do His pleasure,[1] when all is dark to the ordinary eye. "The angel of the Lord tarrieth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them."[2]

II.

Here then we may study, as it were through a microscope, the act or process of faith in the human soul. What is faith? It is, says the Apostle, "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."[3] It is the faculty which reaches to an object beyond sense, yet which apprehends that object with a certainty equal at least to the certainty of things of sense. Let us pause to consider rather more at length what faith is, and what it is not.

1. Faith, then, first of all, is not an act of the natural imagination. It is necessary to say this, because a great many persons constantly allude to it in terms which imply that it is. They speak of "a person of great faith," meaning that he is very imaginative; that he has an unusual share of that privileged and versatile faculty which does, indeed, achieve so much for society and for literature, which is the well-spring of poetry, the soul and genius of constructive art, but which is less welcome in the sphere of religion, because its highest efforts result in surrounding us with the unreal while investing it with the attributes of reality.

No. Faith is not another word for a vivid imagination. Imagination deals with that which is not; faith with that which is: imagination with fiction, faith with fact. The objects of faith and the objects of imagination may have this in common, that they are both beyond the reach of the natural sight. But there is this difference: that the objects of faith, being real, may become visible to a higher

[1] Ps. ciii. 21. [2] *Ib.* xxxiv. 7. [3] Heb. xi. 1.

sight than that of the bodily eye: while the objects of imagination can never be thus visible to the soul: being fictions, however pleasing, they occur to it as fictions—as fictions of its own creation—not as realities.

When men speak of faith as a vivid and energetic form of imagination, they mean to deny this, without saying that they do so. They mean to imply that just as Virgil projected a picture of the nether world out of the wealth of his fancy, so Evangelists and Apostles have traced their own beautiful pictures of heaven and their awful descriptions of hell and of judgment in the pages of our Testaments by the aid of an extraordinary variety of the religious imagination. The Evangelists and Apostles were not poets, whatever else they were: they were eminently prosaic, and the remark of Rousseau, that the inventor of the Gospel history must have been not less wonderful than its Hero, is at least a satisfactory reply to this theory of faith doing the work of imagination. The Apostles say with St. Peter: "We have not followed cunningly devised fables,"[1] and with St. John, "That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you."[2] Among ordinary Christians, is it not a matter of daily experience that the most earnest and practical believers are constantly persons who are strikingly wanting in the faculty of imagination, and who look at all the concerns of life in a matter-of-fact way which forbids the idea of their ever, under any circumstances, giving the reins to fancy?

In the case before us, Elisha's servant did not create, by an act of imagination, a splendid picture in the air, after the manner of a Milton or a Rubens,—a picture of fiery beings circling round the form of his beloved and imperilled master. It was psychologically impossible. He had his eye upon the hard and menacing fact before him: upon the lines of the Syrian troops who were sent to capture the

[1] 2 St. Pet. i. 16. [2] 1 St. John i. 3.

prophet, his master. He could see nothing beyond the sphere of sense, and was terrified at what he saw, until Elisha prayed that he might see further—into another sphere. Then he saw the world of spirits. But the world of spirits was a thing utterly independent of his imagination. It would have been none the less real if he had never seen it; just as the Syrian troops would have been none the less real, if Elisha's servant had been born blind and had never seen them. His new power of seeing the chariots and horses of fire round about Elisha did not create these spiritual forms and beings. There they were, whether he and others saw them or not, just as the more remote planets were certainly revolving in their orbits during the centuries when our science had not yet reached them by her reckonings and her telescopes. Elisha had been just as much encompassed by the spirit-world the moment before his servant saw that this was the case, as he was the moment afterwards. The man's new sight could not create, as his blindness could not have destroyed, the reality.

I hear it whispered, "Yes; but there is a common-sense, based on our ordinary experience, which resists these notions of an invisible world actually around and about us." But what is the real worth of this "common-sense?" When the comet of 1858 appeared, a lecturer made a tour of some country villages in Devonshire, with a view to telling the country people some facts about the beautiful object which night by night attracted so much attention; and among other points he touched upon the calculations which astronomers had made as to the enormous length of this comet's tail. I recollect hearing a countryman who treated this part of his lecture with contemptuous incredulity. "I saw the comet myself," said the peasant to a sympathising crowd of villagers, "and its tail was just four feet long; and how are we to believe this man, who tells us that it was many millions of miles long?" That

was the "common-sense" of ordinary sight pitted against the common-sense of that higher insight into Nature which is won by scientific investigation. But Science, too, can sometimes be guilty of an appeal to common sense of this sort against the assertions of a still higher insight into the super-sensuous realities than her own—against the assertions of faith. The astronomer, with Lord Rosse's telescope at his disposal, sees—he does not imagine—heavenly bodies utterly out of the reach of your ordinary sight or mine: and the servant of Elisha, when the eyes of his spirit were opened, saw, by the aid of a new spiritual faculty, what he would not have imagined—the world of spirits floating in all its power and beauty round his imperilled master.

2. Nor is faith only the conclusion, the final act, of a process of natural reasoning. If this were the case, it would necessarily follow that all people with good understandings must necessarily be believers in Christianity. We know that this is not the case. We know that many persons of great natural abilities, such as Voltaire, have been unbelievers; and this alone would show that something besides natural intelligence is implied in an act of faith. No man whose mind is not impaired, can go through a proposition of Euclid and refuse to assent to the conclusion: but many people do read Paley's Evidences, or what St. Paul says about the Resurrection, and yet do not admit St. Paul's and Paley's conclusion, that Christianity is certainly from God. If believing in Christianity were simply an affair of the natural understanding, this could not be: it would be just as inevitable to believe St. Paul as to believe Euclid.

Why is this so? Why is acceptance of religious truth not as imperative upon the human understanding as the acceptance of mathematical truth? Because the act of faith is not merely an act of the intelligence. It is an act

of the whole inward nature of the affections and the will, as well as of the understanding. "With the heart," says St. Paul, "man believeth unto righteousness." [1] The affections and the will have a great deal to say to an act of faith. The understanding cannot compel it. The evidence at the disposal of the understanding is less than absolutely mathematical, and it does not convince unless the moral nature is in such a condition as to wish that it should be convincing. The evidence of religion at our disposal is designedly less than strictly irresistible; in order that there may be room for the play of our moral nature—so that the act of faith may be a test, not of the goodness of our natural understandings, but of the state of our hearts and dispositions. If faith were merely an assent of the understanding to a conclusion warranted by sufficient evidence, it is plain that St. Paul could never speak of it as he does when writing to the Romans and the Galatians, as that which justifies before God. Goodness of understanding could be no more a reason for our acceptance with God than strength of limbs or retentiveness of memory.

Faith is indeed spoken of as it is in the New Testament, because it is a test of the moral nature: because a man believes upon adequate although not absolutely compulsory evidence, in obedience to the promptings of his heart and will. A man who has made the most of natural light will desire the light of Revelation; will be looking out for it; will believe that the Author of the law of right and wrong within him is likely to unfold something more about Himself. But then what is it which at the decisive moment makes the desire of the heart on the one side, and the evidence at the disposal of the understanding on the other, result in an act of faith? What is it which strikes the sacred spark, which combines the action of the

[1] Rom. x. 10.

understanding and the yearnings of the heart into a single act, which supersedes while it combines both of them?

"The Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, horses of fire and chariots of fire round about Elisha." Faith is, in the last resort, the fire lighted in the soul by a ray of grace: a gift from God—a fresh gift which Nature can neither rival nor anticipate. Elisha might have insisted upon many considerations which ought, in reason, to have satisfied the young man, that God and His holy ones were near at hand, and that the near presence of the Syrians did not amount to any real reason for despair. Had God not helped the patriarch Jacob thus? Had He not delivered Israel in the wilderness, and David from the wild beasts and from the hand of Saul, and Elijah quite recently from all the power of Ahab and Jezebel? Was it to be supposed that He would desert His prophet now? or that, happen what might, He was unconcerned or powerless? Elisha did not argue: he prayed. He prayed that the Lord would open the eyes of the young man to see things as they are—to see not merely the world of sense, but the world of spirit. And his prayer was granted.

This exactly agrees with what we learn about faith in the New Testament. Faith is represented as a new spiritual sense—an endowment or gift bestowed upon the soul of man by the Holy Ghost. It is contrasted with natural sight: "we walk by faith, and not by sight," says St. Paul.[1] It is contrasted with natural reason: since "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."[2] It is a higher reason than Nature gives: it is a higher and more perfect sight, which God gives to Nature; which Nature cannot, if she would, herself achieve. "Faith," says St. Paul again,

[1] 2 Cor. v. 7. [2] 1 Cor. ii. 14.

"is not of yourselves: it is the gift of God."[1] Thus it happened that when the Lord had opened the heart of Lydia, she believed the things that were spoken by Paul.[2] Thus St. Paul prays that the Ephesians may know what is the hope of their calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance among the saints. He does not expect them to know this by nature, but only when "the eyes of their understanding are enlightened," *i.e.* as a consequence of faith.[3]

Do I say that natural reason has no office whatever to discharge in the work of establishing our religious convictions? Far from it. If this were so, not merely the evidential theology of the Church, but much of the language of the Bible itself, would be a vast mistake. Reason can do much for faith. Reason stands to faith as did the Baptist to Christ our Lord; she is the messenger which makes ready the way of faith in the soul. Reason can explain, infer, combine, reduce difficulties to their true proportions, make the most of considerations which show what is to be expected. But she cannot do the work of God's grace: she cannot open the eyes of the young man, and make him see. If this last triumph is to be achieved, it must be by grace, given in answer to prayer. Too often men do not believe, not because belief is impossible for reasonable men, but because they imagine it to be simply the result of a natural form of mental exercise, instead of a heavenly gift, for which indeed natural reason may and should prepare the way, but which is given in answer to prayer. Brethren, would you believe, pray: and sooner or later you will believe.

3. Faith is not the same thing as trust. Certainly men speak loosely nowadays of having faith in a person or an institution, meaning that they trust the man's character or the efficiency of the institution. If we cannot profess

[1] Eph. ii. 8. [2] Acts xvi. 14. [3] Eph. i. 17, 18.

this faith we do not therefore cease to believe that the man or institution exists, but only that certain qualities are wanting which command our confidence. In this popular way of speaking we are really making the word "faith" do the work of another word besides itself,—the word "trust." But, properly speaking, faith precedes trust: trust is based on faith. In order to trust a person you must know from authority, if you do not know by experience, that he is a person whom it is well to trust; and when this knowledge is received on authority it is, properly speaking, faith. Much of the faith shown towards our Lord in the Gospel was trust as well as faith: just as it was obedience as well as faith. But faith was the basis of trust, as it was the basis of obedience: and to trust Jesus Christ is as distinct a thing from believing in Him as obeying Him is.

The act by which Elisha's servant saw the world of spirits round about his master was not an act of trust. No doubt it led on to such an act: it was meant to do so. Elisha, to whom the spirit-world lay open, prayed that what he saw might be seen by his servant; that his servant might have confidence in God's power to save them from the Syrians. But the act of apprehension of that which had been before hidden from the natural sight was a totally distinct thing from the confidence to which it was intended to lead. It was the illuminated soul gazing with open eyes at realities beyond the sphere of sense: it was practically a consummate act of faith.

III.

Let us see in this history—

1. A remedy against despondency, such as good Christians often feel on contemplating the state of the world at particular periods. All seems to be going against the

cause of right, of truth, of God. "The enemy crieth so, and the ungodly cometh on so fast, for they are minded to do me some mischief, so maliciously are they set against me."[1] The Psalmist's cry is echoed by the Church, kneeling at the foot of the Throne of Christ, throughout the centuries: intellectual assailants, political adversaries, all the passions, all the prejudices, all the misapprehensions of unregenerate humanity, come down and besiege the prophet in Dothan. All might seem lost again and again, if the eyes of the spirit could not be opened to perceive that they which are with us are more than they which are with them.[2] Courage! the unseen is greater than the seen: the eternal will outlive the things of time. An act of faith may cross the threshold, and may at once correct the apparent preponderance of evil by a vision of the Throne and of the resources of the All-Good.

2. See, too, in this history our patent of nobility. It has been a common saying, quoted in order to explain and justify many changes on the Continent within the last ten years,[3] that it is better to be citizens of a great State than of a small one. It is better for many reasons: for this among the rest. There is an inspiration which comes from the sense of wide and noble fellowship, of high and distinguished associates and guardians, which is denied to those who have it not. And in His Kingdom God has provided us with this. All the races of the world furnish their contributions to the Universal Church: but the frontier of sense is not the frontier of the Church; it embraces both worlds—the unseen as well as the visible. "Ye are come," says the Apostle, writing to Christian converts, "unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly of the

[1] Ps. lv. 3. [2] 2 Kings vi. 16.
[3] This sermon was preached in the year 1872.

Church of the First-born, whose names are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant."[1] The Church is, according to the Apostle, a world-embracing, mixed society, consisting here of the faithful, there of the blessed angels and the spirits of the blessed dead; united in the bonds of indissoluble communion, and all ranged beneath the Throne of Thrones,—the Throne of God, of Jesus.

Does this lofty conviction, think you, inspire no hatred of sin, no longing for a higher life, no wish to live as the companion of beings who constitute the Household of God and are our predestined fellow-citizens? The Syrian host may press us hard,—the host of temptations, of bad thoughts, of bad acquaintances, of haunting memories:—but when, at the prayer of the Church, or our own, our eyes open upon the realities around and above us, we may remember that we have a great destiny before us, and means at hand to prepare for it. "To have no sense of the invisible," said a great writer, "is the ruin of art." To have no sense of the invisible, it may be most certainly added, is the ruin of virtue.

Lastly, see here the real secret of effective prayer and praise. Why is prayer, particularly public prayer, in so many cases a cold and heartless form? For two reasons, especially. Men enter on it without having any true knowledge of themselves; of their sins and wants, as well as of their hopes and fears; of their real state before God, as well as of their reputed character in the eyes of men; in a word, they have no true knowledge of that for which prayer wins a remedy. Thus they have no personal interests to import into the public language of the Church: they do not know enough about themselves to say with

[1] Heb. xii. 24.

perfect sincerity that they have erred and strayed from God's ways like lost sheep, or that there are things which, for their unworthiness, they dare not, and for their blindness they cannot, ask. But, secondly, and chiefly, prayer is so cold and heartless a form because men have no true sight of God, of Jesus, of His Majesty, His Beauty, His Glory, such as is possible to our finite and purblind gaze; —of the everlasting worship which surrounds Him, of the courtiers around His Throne, those ministers of His that do His pleasure. Until this is the case, at least in some degree, what a torrent of unmeaning verbiage is the public language of the Church! Take that glorious hymn in which the Morning Service culminates, the *Te Deum*. If the soul sees nothing beyond the veil, what must be meant when the lips repeat such verses as—

> "To Thee all Angels cry aloud: the heavens, and all the powers therein.
> To Thee Cherubin, and Seraphin: continually do cry,
> Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth;
> Heaven and earth are full of the Majesty of Thy glory"!

or when, after this first ascent towards the Throne of the Thrice-Holy, there follows a second:—

> "The glorious company of the Apostles praise Thee.
> The goodly fellowship of the Prophets praise Thee.
> The noble army of Martyrs praise Thee:
> The Father: of an Infinite Majesty;
> Thine honourable, true, and only Son;.
> Also the Holy Ghost, the Comforter"!

or when all is finally concentrated on Jesus Christ—as "the King of Glory," as "the Everlasting Son of the Father," with Whom we may plead for help, because when He took upon Him to deliver man, He did not abhor the Virgin's womb; because when He had overcome the sharpness of death He opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers! How unutterably piteous for us, if when

such words are sung, we are relieving the weariness of mental contact with vacancy, by dwelling on the triumphs of great composers, or on the skill of trained choirs, or on the associations of an historical building, or, it is possible enough, by thinking of something which ought to have been dropped out of our minds when we entered the church-door! There are few better prayers on entering a church than Elisha's, "'Lord, open mine eyes, that I may see.' I do not wish to mock Thee by lip-service; I do not wish to pile my ordinary business thoughts, or thoughts of pleasure, on the very steps of Thy Throne. Open mine eyes that I may see Thee in Thy Beauty, and in Thy glorious Presence may lose my relish for all that only belongs to time." Believe me, it is when the soul struggles thus with God in spiritual agony, that it is emancipated from the tyranny of sense, and, like the dying Stephen, really sees the heavens opened, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.[1]

[1] Acts vii. 55, 56.

SERMON XXI.

THE ZEAL OF JEHU.

2 Kings x. 16.

And Jehu said, Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord.

THE Bible is like the world in this, that it contains pictures not merely of great saints and of extraordinary sinners, but also, and in a larger proportion, of what we now call mixed characters. Thus it surely is true to life; since the majority of men are not eminently holy or outrageously wicked, but something between the two. In the vast intermediate region of mixed characters, there are indeed gradations and varieties almost infinite in their complexity; so that while in the higher frontier of this region the admixture of evil is sometimes inconsiderable, it is enormous and almost overpowering in the opposite quarter. Still the great majority of men are mixed characters: and when we encounter a mixed character, whether described in the Bible, or in a modern biography, or moving before us in the scenes of real life, most of us feel a kinship with it which is easily explained. For it belongs to our own region of existence: we see ourselves more or less reflected in it; its good points encourage us and its deficiencies warn us all the more effectively, because its general level of attainment is so like our own. But in daily experience it is often easier to be interested in a mixed character than to see exactly what lesson or warning it is meant to convey: and Holy Scripture helps

us to read modern life with new eyes, and, it may be hoped, above all to take a practical interest in our own improvement by the guidance which it affords us in studying characters of this description.

I.

Jehu, the founder of the fifth dynasty of the kings of Israel, interests us partly by his career and achievements, but still more by the problem of his character.

As a boy, Jehu was attached to the body-guard of King Ahab. He rode behind his royal master on the road from Samaria to Jezreel, when the prophet Elijah suddenly appeared and announced God's certain vengeance against the murderers of Naboth. Under Ahab's successor, Jehu became a soldier of distinction. The reckless fury with which he drove his war-chariot proved that he had no lack of nerve or muscle; but he must have had credit for other and higher qualities as well, since we find him, while still a fairly young man, commanding the army which was besieging Ramoth-Gilead in the Syrian war. It was during this siege that an occurrence took place which formed the turning-point of his career.

So far as we know, the great prophet Elijah never saw Jehu except when he met him in Ahab's company after the murder of Naboth, on the road to Jezreel. But Jehu filled a great place in the prophetic forecast of Elijah. In the vision of Horeb, Jehu is named as the future king of Israel who is to execute the penal judgments of God: although Elijah never himself obeyed the command to anoint Jehu to this office. But the command, once given, was cherished as sacred in the prophetic order; and it was carried out by the direction of Elisha, during this very siege of Ramoth-Gilead. One day while the leading officers of the besieging army were sitting together, a

wild-looking young man entered, and insisted on a private interview with Jehu. After some hesitation, Jehu followed him; and then the young prophet poured the sacred anointing oil which he had with him on the head of the future king; told him, in the Lord's name, that he was to destroy the whole family of Ahab; and then, having delivered his message, rushed from the house, and fled.

Jehu returned to the assembled officers, who saw at once from his appearance that something of grave import had passed between the general and his strange visitor. Jehu tried at first to baffle their inquiries; but at last was obliged to tell them what the young prophet had said and done. The officers, and, as it seems, the whole army, greeted him with enthusiasm: the officers placed him as if on a throne at the top of the stairs which led from the central court of the guard-house to its roof: they carpeted the ground beneath his feet with their military cloaks; the trumpets sounded a royal salute, and, so far as the camp was concerned, the revolution was complete. It was no longer with Jehu a question of taking Ramoth-Gilead, but of how to carry out the stern duties which were laid on him by the message of the prophet. All communications between the army and the royal city of Jezreel were stopped, and Jehu himself set off for Jezreel at full speed, with his old friend and companion in arms, Bidkar, and a detachment of cavalry.

And here we come to the two terrible and stern achievements which are associated with Jehu's name in Sacred History.

Of these, the first is the destruction of the entire family of Ahab. Not until Jehu had reached the gates of Jezreel was alarm taken by the reigning family. Jehu first slew the king of Israel, Jehoram; and then while his soldiers pursued and killed the flying king of Judah, he himself carried out the sentence on Jezebel. Then followed a work

of extermination, which, even at this distance of time, we read with a shudder. All the remaining relatives of Ahab in Jezreel, all the officers of the court, all the priests of the court,[1] were slaughtered. Seventy princes of the royal house were being educated in Samaria: and Jehu warned their guardians of the danger of resisting him. Their heads were forthwith piled in two heaps on either side of the gate of Jezreel. Jehu proceeded to Samaria; and on his way he met forty-two sons and nephews of the king of Judah, who, all unconscious of what had happened, were on their way to visit their relations in Jezreel. They were all forthwith put to the sword: and Jehu's first achievement was complete. The family of Ahab was, with the important exception of Queen Athaliah of Judah, for all practical purposes destroyed.

Jehu was on his way from Jezreel to Samaria in order to carry out his second achievement, the destruction of the worship of Baal, which had been imported from Phœnicia. This worship was really offered to the productive powers of Nature personified as Deity; it was thus a substitution of the creature for the Creator, and in practice was attended by impurities that were all its own. Jehu would have had three reasons for disliking it: one religious, one military, and one political. As an Israelite, he viewed it as an alien and idolatrous creed: as a soldier, he knew that it enervated the manhood of the country: as a statesman, he connected it with the mischievous influence of the family of Ahab. But to overthrow the Baal-worship was no easy matter. It had the sympathies of the majority of the people: some years before only seven thousand in Israel had not bowed the knee to the famous image of Baal in Samaria. At this time Samaria was the centre of the Baal-worship. In Samaria was the great temple which King Ahab had built, and which was resorted to from all

[1] 2 Kings x. 11.

parts of the country: and accordingly it was at Samaria that Jehu determined to strike a decisive blow.

Jehu was on his way to Samaria when he met the Arabian ascetic Jehonadab the son of Rechab. This remarkable man was at once the chief of a wandering tribe and the founder of a religious rule of life. He enjoined his tribesmen to drink no wine, to build no houses, and to engage in no tillage of the soil. Living in the heart of Judah, they were to have no community with its social life: and that they still kept this rule years afterwards we know from Jeremiah, who tells us that when the Rechabites took refuge within the walls of Jerusalem from the invading armies of Babylon, they could not be tempted to break the precepts of their ancestor.[1] Jehonadab was already a public character; and Jehu, after ascertaining that he sympathised with himself, took him up into his war-chariot, exclaiming, "Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord."

In the bloody scene which followed, Jehu acted with the same union of secrecy and decision that had marked his conduct in destroying the royal family of Ahab. He appeared in Samaria as an ardent patron of the popular worship: "Ahab," he said, "served Baal a little, but Jehu shall serve him much."[2] He announced a public festival in which the worship of Baal was to be newly inaugurated. There were splendid vestments, costly sacrifices, a vast assembly which filled the great temple from end to end. King Jehu himself officiated; he offered the chief sacrifice to Baal; and the enthusiasm was at its height. After ascertaining that no worshippers of the true God had mingled from curiosity in the great multitude, a signal was given to eighty armed men, and the entire congregation of idolaters was put to the sword. The sanctuary of the temple was invaded by the soldiery; the great stone

[1] Jer. xxxv. 1-11. [2] 2 Kings x. 18.

image of Baal was destroyed; the wooden pillars dedicated to the inferior gods around it were burnt; and the shrine of the Phœnician divinity was deliberately devoted to public uses which effectually destroyed the idea of any sanctity attaching to it. The worship of the Phœnician Baal in Israel never recovered from this crushing blow.

II.

This was Jehu's zeal for the Lord, which Jehonadab was to witness, and did witness. Let us endeavour, if we can, to form a religious estimate of its worth.

What is zeal? It is conviction in a practical and working form: it is the business-like side of love, whether of God or man. Zeal, says St. Thomas Aquinas, speaking roughly, is the redoubled energy of love. Zeal, being an ardent love of God, is shown in a desire to promote the love of God, the worship of God, the praise of God, the glory of God, wherever this is possible. But zeal, also, has a sharp eye to everything that runs counter to God's Will and His Glory; it rebukes vice; it combats error; it does all that it may to counteract and remove the influences which are detrimental to the cause of God in the world at large and in the hearts of individual men.

If we open the Bible we have not far to look in order to read the burning words of true and pure zeal for God. Thus the Psalmist, whose words received in our Lord their highest fulfilment: "The zeal of Thine house hath even eaten me; and the rebukes of them that rebuked Thee are fallen upon me:"[1] in other words, "the dishonour and affronts which have been offered to Thee, I have felt to be my own." Again, "My zeal hath even consumed me, because mine enemies have forgotten Thy words."[2] Again, "It grieveth me when I see the transgressors, because they

[1] Ps. lxix. 9. [2] *Ib.* cxix. 139.

keep not Thy law."[1] Thus Elijah on Horeb: "I am very jealous for the Lord God of hosts, because the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant."[2] Thus our Divine Lord: "I am come to send a fire on the earth; and what will I but that it be already kindled?"[3] Or take up St. Paul's Epistles. He is writing to the Philippians: "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge, and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent: that ye may be sincere, and without offence, until the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God."[4] Or he is writing to the Thessalonians: "We might have been burdensome to you, as the apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: so, being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the Gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us."[5] Or to the Judaizing Galatians he exclaims, with passionate affection: "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you."[6] Or he protests to the Romans, when speaking of the rejection of Christianity by the mass of the Jews: "I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh."[7] So too St. James, when encouraging those who labour for souls: "If any do err from the truth, and one convert him: let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."[8]

These are but samples of the language of zeal which are

[1] Ps. cxix. 158. [2] 1 Kings xix. 10. [3] St. Luke xii. 49.
[4] Phil. i. 9-11. [5] 1 Thess. ii. 6-8. [6] Gal. iv. 19.
[7] Rom. ix. 2, 3. [8] St. James v. 19, 20.

to be found in the Bible. The circumstances under which it was uttered were widely different: the immediate objects in view were often as distinct as the distinctness of two Revelations, or as the lapse of a thousand years could make them. But under each Revelation, and in all times, the spirit of zeal is the same. We sometimes hear men speak as if zeal were only a Jewish virtue, and as if in Christendom it had been replaced by some milder and less effective substitute, such, for example, as religious sentiment. But, as we have seen, the Bible gives no sort of countenance to this notion; and indeed, it is utterly opposed to the reason of the case. If a very partial Revelation, such as that of Sinai, in which God's awful law was revealed, without the alleviations of the great doctrines of Redemption and Grace, could yet stir the hearts of men to live as did the writer of Psalm cxix., and to die as did the Maccabees: what ought not the Gospel to achieve, in which Life and Immortality are fairly and fully brought to light:[1] in which Jesus Christ, Incarnate, Crucified, Risen, Ascended, Interceding, forms a bridge between earth and heaven: in which the Heart of God is unveiled to the heart of man in the Death of God's Sinless Son, and man is rendered capable of companionship with angels, through the gift of a new nature, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness?[2] Surely where this glorious creed is believed, it must, at least at times, set the human heart on fire: it must produce missionaries, apostles, confessors, martyrs: it must inspire men with a courage equal to the needs of a Religion that only binds up the wounds of human nature on condition of telling it the truth, and that, in the last resort, seeks nothing with entire fervour but the smile of God, and fears nothing but His displeasure.

But if zeal is not especially a Jewish virtue, the form

[1] 2 Tim. i. 10. [2] Eph. iv. 24.

which it took in Jehu's case was eminently Jewish. It expressed itself in a frightful destruction of human life. On this account some persons might be disposed to say that it was not zeal for the Lord at all. But they forget that God's work may take one form in one age or set of circumstances, and another in another: that the moral standard of the Pentateuch is not inconsistent with, but is lower than, that of the Gospels; that the acts of a good Jew, face to face with the enemies of his religion, must not be judged of by a Christian standard: since the Jew belongs to an earlier stage in the religious education of the world. Our Lord warned His Apostles against the temptation to propagate or defend His kingdom by the sword; but the Law of Moses punished idolatry with death, and Jehu was acting in obedience to the idea of duty to which he had been trained. There is nothing to be said on Christian grounds for the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, or for the brutalities of Cromwell at Drogheda and Wexford: but when Jehu destroyed the Baal-worshippers in Samaria, the law of Love had not yet been revealed in all its beauty, nor had men learnt that the Holy Spirit is a better Guide into all truth than the weapons of carnal warfare.

Jehu's zeal may then have been a zeal for the Lord, notwithstanding the slaughter to which it led. But what are we to think of the stratagem by which the slaughter of the Baal-worshippers was effected? Jehu compassed his purpose by affecting to patronise, when he meant to exterminate. How is this compatible with any real anxiety to do high service to the God of truth?

Here it is necessary to remember that the ruder and less-informed conscience of mankind is less careful about the choice of means than man's riper and more enlightened conscience. Jehu was satisfied that it was a duty, on religious grounds especially, to destroy the Baal-worshippers,

who were numerous and powerful. As a soldier, Jehu would have thought everything fair in war; and he was at war, he thought, with the Baal-worship, and all that it represented and implied. Jacob had been right in seeking the birthright, though wrong in the means by which he sought it. Jael had been blessed for destroying Sisera, though not for abusing the duties of hospitality. A more instructed conscience than was Jehu's would have shrunk from proclaiming a festival for Baal, with the object of destroying his worshippers: but Jehu's zeal for the Lord is not altogether impaired because he did not know that a rightful act must be carried out by rightful means in order to be well-pleasing to God. We must distinguish between the absolute standard of right, and that relative standard which was present to the mind of Jehu; and if we do this, we may well think that his act in itself, although impossible for us, and the means by which he achieved it, although still more impossible, were not, for a man in his age and circumstances, incompatible with a true zeal for the Lord.

But there are features in Jehu's zeal—two especially—which seem to show that it cannot have been so genuine and admirable as we could wish.

(*a*) It was spoiled, first of all, by ostentation. Jehu desired Jehonadab to come and see what he could do for the Lord. It has been suggested that Jehu's motive was of a different character; that in asking Jehonadab to go with him, he was anxious to get the sanction of a personage who was widely respected in an enterprise which could not but expose him to obloquy. But of this there is no evidence whatever. Jehu was a member of the Sacred Commonwealth of Israel, with its unique revelation, with its sacred law, with its authoritative and, as Jehu had reason to know, active prophetic order. What need was there for applying for religious countenance and sanction to an Arab

chief, however distinguished by high character or ascetic attainments? On the other hand, Jehonadab, with his nomad life, and wide intercourse with men of all classes and minds, was just the kind of person whom, in a primitive age, a vain man would have endeavoured to interest in his own proceedings, with a view to securing or enlarging notoriety. Jehu's invitation to Jehonadab was equivalent to that of a man nowadays, who should write a paragraph on the subject of his own proceedings, and insert it in a newspaper. "Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord," was certainly the language of ostentation. And ostentation is fatal to the purity, if not to the force of zeal. A man who is acting simply for God does not care to say more about his action than he can possibly help. A man whose ruling motive is a pure intention to serve God, so far as his knowledge of God's Will may enable him, will be very careful not to drag it out on every occasion into the light of day, or indeed on any occasion when he can rightly avoid doing so. A true and pure religious motive is like a delicate flower that will not bear exposure; to place it where all the world may sing its praises is to condemn it to be scorched by the sun or bitten by the frost: its true and safe home is in the recesses of the soul, where He sees and does justice to it, whatever it be, Whose approval is alone really worth having. Jehu's zeal for the Lord became something else than pure zeal, as soon as Jehonadab was asked to inspect and admire it; it was zeal for the Lord, dashed by zeal for his own credit and reputation: God's approval was still valuable, but so was the approval and admiration of Jehonadab. How much zeal is of this mixed character! What does He think of it Who has a first and unique claim on the energies of the soul?

(β) Jehu's zeal was spoiled, secondly, by inconsistency; and by inconsistency I mean, not the inconsistency of weakness, which certainly there is no kind of reason for attribut-

ing to Jehu, but the inconsistency of want of principle. Baal-worship was not the only kind of idolatry that then reared its head in the land of Israel. There was the worship of the calves, which had been instituted by Jeroboam from a political motive—that of providing a religious attraction to the ten separated tribes—an attraction powerful enough to prevent their attending the worship of God in Jerusalem at the great festivals. This older idolatry was not less inconsistent with the honour and will of God than was the newer Baal or Nature worship introduced from Phœnicia; and a man whose highest motive in destroying the Baal-worshippers had been zeal for God's honour, would not have left this older, and in some respects more mischievous, form of error untouched. But we are told that "from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not from after them, to wit, the golden calves that were in Bethel, and that were in Dan."[1] And again, that "Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart; for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam" (that is, from the established calf-worship), "which made Israel to sin."[2] Can we see a reason for this difference of Jehu's attitude towards the Baal-worship in Samaria and the calf-worship in Bethel? Surely we can. The Baal-worship was bound up with the dynasty of Ahab, who had so largely patronised it: it thus was an influence politically hostile to Jehu, and he had reasons, as a statesman, for fearing it. But the calf-worship recalled a dynasty which had long disappeared, and therefore it excited no political apprehensions. On the contrary, there were political reasons for maintaining it, which would have weighed with a man who was prepared to sacrifice his religion to his politics. It was useful in maintaining the separateness of the kingdom of Israel against the religious claims of Judah: and Jehu

[1] 2 Kings x. 29. [2] *Ib.* 31.

was as anxious as any of his predecessors to do this, and indifferent to the idolatry and schism which was upheld in doing it.

Is Jehu quite singular in this? Has he no followers at the present day? Do we not sometimes witness a devotion to the cause of Christ and His Church, which goes to a certain point, and is then mysteriously arrested, as if by an unseen hand,—which achieves one form of goodness, and shrinks from or disavows another,—which stamps out one form of evil, and tolerates or encourages another? The motive of the inconsistency lies beneath the surface: but there it is, and it destroys the religious value of what little is done. A true zeal for God does not draw arbitrary frontiers like this to the range of its efforts: it stays not its hand till all that can be done is done for Him.

The moral which many persons have drawn from Jehu's career is that which was expressed in the epigram of the French statesman, who, let us remember, was also an apostate bishop, "Above all things, no zeal." Possibly Talleyrand may have meant by zeal administrative fussiness; he knew the practical worth of single-hearted devotion in others, at any rate to a political cause. But this is certain, that a religion which does not provoke zeal is already dead in the hearts of men: and zeal is not to be discredited by the false or imperfect samples of the virtue which may meet us in our experience of the world. If Jehu's zeal is open to criticism, we have nothing to say on this score against Elijah: and Jehu's zeal, though spoilt by his vanity and his inconsistency, was better, infinitely better, than sheer indifference. To try to do something for God, even by fits and starts,—even amid the triumphant importunity of selfish motives, which are constantly daubing our little efforts with earthly stains,—is far, far better than to fold one's hands and do nothing

for Him, while secretly investing what is but the indolence of pure selfishness with the attributes of a fancied superiority to the petty activities of sectarian enterprise.

III.

The lessons which Jehu's case does really teach us are indeed important. One is, that great results are constantly achieved by God by the means of very imperfect instruments. Jehu's work, stern as it was, was a great work: though Jehu himself was not, in the moral and religious sense, a great man. His work was done, in spite of his being what he was: it was a greater blessing to Israel and to the world for which it was achieved, than to himself, the workman. So it has constantly been since. Great truths have been vindicated, great causes promoted, great reformations carried out by men whose characters, upon close examination, prove to be very defective—to be impaired by ambition, by vanity, by unscrupulousness, or, it may be, by worse faults than these. Never mind. The work is not theirs, but God's. They are but instruments in His Hands just as are the elements of the physical world: and their shortcomings no more discredit the value of what was carried out through their agency, than the poverty of his materials is fatal to the character, or to the performances, of a great artist, who indeed shows his power in conquering his disadvantages, and in rendering with perfect fidelity upon the canvas, or into marble, the ideas which have taken possession of his soul.

Jehu also teaches us the risk of attempting to carry out public works of a religious or moral character without previous discipline of the heart and life. If Jehu had been a more religious man he would not have failed to put down the calf-worship, nor would he have spent the last twenty-seven years of his reign in practical indolence.

He had great public duties thrust upon him before he was ready for them in respect of personal self-discipline. How often is this the case in our day! Men find themselves taking part in philanthropic or religious efforts, attending public meetings, making speeches, writing letters and articles and manifestoes, before they have learned really to pray, or to keep their consciences, by God's grace, in moderate order, or to try to live by some kind of rule. The consequence is, that they, sooner or later, commit themselves, and compromise the cause which they are anxious to maintain; or their earnestness seems to come to a sudden standstill, and the world rubs its hands and says that this is just what it always expected, and that gusts of enthusiasm do more harm than good. The truth is that many a man in this position has, like Jehu, sincerely wished to do something for a good object, but he has begun at the wrong end. Public efforts for good can never take the place of care of the workman's own soul.

> "*Thou* to wax fierce
> In the cause of the Lord,
> To threat and to pierce
> With the heavenly sword:
> . . . .
> Thou warnest and smitest!
> Yet Christ must atone
> For a soul that thou slightest—
> Thine own."[1]

Above all, let us be sure that a zeal for the Lord must be worthy of its name. It must not be at bottom, or largely, a zeal for somebody or something else, or for self. A pure intention to glorify God is the salt of the little useful work any of us may be permitted to do in this short life. The absence of this steady purpose is a fatal flaw even in careers which leave their mark upon nations and centuries, and which fire the imaginations of millions

[1] *Lyra Apostolica*, lxvi.

of men. The presence of this intention ennobles work on the very humblest scale, and associates it with the deeds of those who stand among the foremost in the realms of light. Such zeal and energy as Jehu's is, beyond dispute, able to record itself in large characters on the page of history; but in the kingdom of souls it were better to be the poor widow, who, all unperceived as she thought, dropped her mite into the treasury, and won the blessing of the Eternal Christ.[1]

[1] St. Mark xii. 41-44.

SERMON XXII.

THE VIRTUE OF ELISHA'S BONES.

2 KINGS xiii. 20, 21.

And Elisha died, and they buried him. And the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year. And it came to pass, as they were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a band of men; and they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet.

THIS passage occurs in the proper lesson for Easter Tuesday: and we can see at a glance that it is designed to give a turn to our thoughts in harmony with the Easter season. But how it is to do this will be better understood, if we begin by fixing our attention on the words which are before us, and the event which they describe.

Elisha, the disciple and successor of Elijah, was in many ways unlike him. Elijah was a child of the desert, resembling in his appearance the wild Bedouin Arabs; shunning the haunts of civilised man; clad only in a rough mantle, with dishevelled locks, and a wild impetuous manner. Elisha was an inhabitant of cities: of Jericho, of Samaria, of Dothan; the guest of the Shunammite lady, of the college of the prophets, of the king of Israel. His dress and appearance were those of an ordinary Israelite; his hair was trimmed in the usual manner; he used a staff, as was usual with Israelites of advanced years; his

ways were those of cultivated men. Elijah's work was to destroy idolatry, and all who upheld it. Elisha's work was to build up and heal the wounds of Israel. Elijah was chiefly a preacher of righteousness, who worked miracles occasionally in order to enforce his lessons; he was what Samuel had been before him. Elisha was, before all things, a worker of miracles; his miracles occupy a much more important place in the Bible record about him than his teaching. Elijah ascends by a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha is buried in the usual way, but his grave is the scene of miracles. Elijah is the type of John the Baptist: in mode of life, in spiritual temper, in the scope and purpose of his mission he resembles our Lord's great forerunner. Elisha is the type of our Lord Himself. Like Jesus Christ, he came eating and drinking. His miracles, like those of Jesus Christ, were generally beneficent; but they were sometimes, as with the children at Bethel, judgments. Like our Lord, his loving, gentle temper made him the friend of all classes; kings, generals, widows, poor prophets, came to him with their troubles for support and advice. Like our Lord, though of course in a very different way, he did not lose his power when he died. As the son of Sirach says of him, "Whilst he lived, he was not moved with the presence of any prince, neither could any bring him into subjection. No word could overcome him; and after his death his body prophesied. He did wonders in his life, and at his death were his works marvellous." [1]

I.

The miracle which occurred at the tomb of Elisha connects him, especially, as a type of Christ, with the glories of the Holy Sepulchre. If he did not rise from death,

[1] Ecclus. xlviii. 12-14.

God put such honour upon him that he quickened the dead to life.

The circumstances are these. Elisha, so the Jewish historian Josephus tells us, had had a magnificent funeral. He had been buried, no doubt, in the usual Jewish fashion, —in a cave or cell excavated in the side of a perpendicular face of rock, the opening of which was closed by a heavy stone. Some time after his death another funeral was being conducted hard by, when the mourners saw in the distance a band of armed Moabites. The Moabites had now had time to recover from their great defeat by Jehoram and Jehoshaphat; they had spread themselves over the districts north of the river Arnon; and every year, when the spring crops were just ripe, their hordes poured over the fields of Samaria on their errand of plunder and violence. It was one of these bands of spoilers which was observed in the distance by the mourners who were burying a man somewhere near the tomb of Elisha. They wished to put the corpse for safety into the nearest hiding-place before the Moabites were upon them. It may have been accident, it may have been design, which led them to choose the tomb of Elisha; it may have been the depth and spaciousness of the cave; it may have been the prophet's reputation for sanctity. So, as the original says, "they thrust the man into the sepulchre."

The Jews, as you would know, made no use of coffins. At the end of the cave Elisha's bones lay, wrapped up in the bandages which had enveloped his corpse. "Then," we are told, "when the man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet." There is no other miracle in Holy Scripture which is exactly like this: and it certainly is much more striking (if it is right to use such a word) than any of those which were performed by Elisha during his lifetime. It produced a

great effect upon the Jews; they held this posthumous miracle to be Elisha's chief title to distinction among the prophets. "After his death his body prophesied," or taught—that was his crowning glory in the Jewish schools; and the question may be asked why such a distinction should have been conferred upon him.

Here, brethren, remark that it is no reason against the truth of a miracle that we men are unable to discover an adequate reason for its having been wrought. This has indeed been maintained, though very unadvisedly, by respectable writers; and the mistake lies in supposing that all the reasons for a given occurrence which are obvious to the Infinite Intelligence of God, must be obvious to you and me. Not now to travel beyond the limits of Scripture, there are miracles, such as Elisha's causing the iron to swim,[1] for which it is difficult to suggest an adequate motive. But this difficulty will not weigh with any humble and reverent Christian who does not already consider himself to be a sort of private secretary to the Master of the Universe. He will prudently remember that God may have reasons for the miracle which do not occur to himself.

And yet we may trace a particular motive for the miracle which God worked through the bones of Elisha.

In the depressed condition of Israel, Elisha's prophecies of victory over Syria were the main support of the hopes which fostered religious and national life. But Elisha's voice had been silenced in death. Syria was as threatening as ever, and if Elisha's authority did not decline, his sayings were at any rate likely to be forgotten. A miracle performed at his grave, like that described in the text, would have the effect of drawing the eyes of his countrymen to their departed adviser: it would assure them that his words were still living, and that he had power with

[1] 2 Kings vi. 1-7.

God. It would convince them that his warnings, his encouragements, his promises, had not died away with his dying breath, when God had put this signal honour upon him as the organ of His own Mind and Will.

It is not to be denied that miracles like this are regarded in our own day with particular disfavour, I might almost say, with repugnance. "People," we are told, "cannot enter into the quickening of a man by the bones of a dead prophet." They do not object to a miracle which follows from the acts or words of a living agent; but they cannot understand a miracle which is worked by contact with a material object in which some "virtue" seems to be supposed to reside.

As to its principle, let us observe this miracle is not alone in Scripture. Akin to it is that which was wrought on the woman with the issue of blood. She touched the hem of Christ's garment; and virtue went out of Him and healed her.[1] In the same way, St. Peter's shadow is said to have had a healing power;[2] and cures were worked by handkerchiefs and aprons brought to the sick from the body of St. Paul.[3] These New Testament miracles may be rightly explained by the Divine Incarnation; Christ is the Life Incarnate: life and health flowed from Him as from a primal source, and those who were around Him were allowed some small share—partial and faint though it was—in their Master's glory. In Elisha's case, the miracle cannot have been an effect—it may have been an acted prediction—of Christ's Incarnate Power.

But, in point of fact, the objection to all such miracles may be met on a very intelligible ground. For the question really is, in the case of every miracle, "Who is the real agent?" Is it the living prophet or apostle who performs the act or utters the word? Surely not. The real Agent is Almighty God; the prophet or

[1] St. Matt. ix. 20-22. [2] Acts v. 15. [3] *Ib.* xix. 12.

apostle only asks Him to act. It is He Who heals the sick, or raises the dead; and He makes use of a human hand or a human voice to mark the time and place in which He wills to do so. But He is not dependent on a human agent to give effect to His Will. He can act through inert matter just as well, if He chooses to do so; and when He does, it is not any quality permanently resident in such matter that works,—it is only and always Himself, the All-wise, the Almighty God.

This enables us to see our way through a shallow objection to the teaching of the Church Catechism about Christian Baptism. The Catechism says that in it a child is made "a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven." Whereupon a great many people exclaim, "How impossible and irrational it is to suppose that a little water in a font, sprinkled on a child by a clergyman, who uses certain sacred words, can produce such a change as that!" Of course, such a supposition would be irrational and impossible; but it is only a supposition, and not the doctrine of the Church. There is no permanent virtue in the water; matter of itself cannot change the qualities of spirit; but behind the water, and the words, and the clergyman, stands Almighty God, the real Baptizer. These outward things are but the covenanted signs of His approach, of His activity; the work is wholly His. The water, left to itself, is just as powerless to convey spiritual life as were the bones of the prophet to give physical life; but when the one and the other are taken into the Almighty Hand, each may become a medium of power: "Whatsoever is done upon earth, He doeth it Himself."[1]

[1] Ps. lxxiv. 13.

II.

But this miracle, like other miracles and providences of God, is a lesson written in characters which all may read —written in action. Action may be language, or rather, more eloquent than language: a parable may be acted as well as spoken, or better. And such an acted parable is this raising of the dead man at the tomb of Elisha.

It teaches us a lesson which we are apt to forget: the power, the quickening, invigorating power of the past. Elisha was dead and buried. His body lay in the cell where they had placed it long before. The world pursued its course; Elisha seemed to be as removed from its interests as if he had been dead for many a century. The king and people of Israel were as godless as they had been; the Syrians were as violent and oppressive as they had been; only Elisha was not there to exhort and rebuke the one, and to keep the other at bay. The dead are soon forgotten. The sympathies, the regrets, —the sincere and insincere regrets—which surround the grave are like the ripples which spread from a pebble that has sunk into the water: as they widen they become fainter, and presently die utterly away. Elisha's death had created a sensation, no doubt; but now that he was buried, all was over. Elisha was thought of as lost utterly to the living world; he was among them "that are wounded, and lie in the grave, who are out of remembrance;"[1] he was with the great dead—with David, with Samuel, and Moses, and the patriarchs. He had passed that line—that dark, sharp line—which in this world of sense severs the present from the past.

Brethren, as our thoughts rest upon the things of time, they necessarily belong to the present, or to the future, or

[1] Ps. lxxxviii. 4.

to the past. The present interests us all. It altogether absorbs hundreds of thousands. It seems, at once, so transitory and so urgent, so full of claims upon all the heart and thought that can be given it, that nothing remains Seize the gifts of the present hour with a glad heart; let the stern problems of the future take care of themselves: so whispered the Epicurean poet[1] nineteen centuries since. "Take no thought for the morrow,"[2] so said our Lord; meaning, "Trust yourselves to the fatherly Providence of God." "Take no thought for the morrow," echoes Satan; meaning, "Forget that there is a future,—an endless future. Bury thought and conscience in the grave of sense and time." Those who live in the present forget alike the future and the past. One such has said, "Of the future I know nothing, and the past I cannot help; I will make the most of the pulses of life, as moment by moment I feel them beat; the rest is beyond me."

Less unreasonable than these "men of the present" are the "men of the future." They certainly understand more of the dignity and scope of existence. "It is folly," say they, "to live only in the present. The present is dying: it escapes us as we try to seize it; it is beyond our capacity to mould or to improve. But the future is ours, if we choose to make it so; the future is the field for improvement, for progress. Let us look forward. Let us, with an Apostle, but in our own way, 'forget those things that are behind, and reach forward to those things that are before;'[3] let us try to make the world better, wiser, happier than it is." These aspirations, rightly understood, are profoundly Christian. A Christian, too, lives in and for the future,—for that eternal future whose horizons are never quite beyond his range of sight. He is especially a man of progress, of that true progress which deals with man as a being who belongs already to another and a

[1] Hor. *Carm.* I. xi. 8. [2] St. Matt. vi. 34. [3] Phil. iii. 13.

higher world. But when men nowadays speak of looking forward, they too generally have only an earthly future in view; a future, if not merely for the individual, yet only for the race; a future which is to be strictly bounded by the limits of sense; a future of improved secular education, lighter taxes, more widely diffused comfort, diminution of class privileges, general physical and social wellbeing, and nothing beyond.

On one point the "men of the future" of this description agree with the men of the present: they both have a genuine contempt for the past. The past, they think, is dead and gone; it has nothing to teach them, nothing to impart to them in the way of vigour and life. It belongs to libraries and bookworms, to graves and sextons, to ruins and antiquarians; it has no claims on the living, working, thinking men who are moving the world. It is rotten in the grave to which the centuries have consigned it, and to meddle with its sepulchre (so they suggest in a whisper) is prejudicial to the public health. Let it alone, so they say, in its charnel-house; it is the rightful portion of the moles and the bats; it is dead beyond recall, and from its fetid bones you can draw neither light nor force, neither hope nor inspiration.

Certainly, the past is not, all of it, vivifying or instructive; every tomb does not contain the bones of an Elisha. But, depend on it, there is that in the past which has power to quicken the present. It may be out of sight; it may have perished from the memories of men; but it only awaits the time when the languid wills, the cold hearts, the dying or dead convictions, shall touch it, and by it be reinvigorated with life.

(*a*) See how this is the case with nations. To a nation, a great past is an element of its life, so powerful and precious that wise patriots and rulers do all they can to preserve it. They cherish its archives and its early

histories; sitting where you do, you observe that they erect statues to its great statesmen, its great warriors, its great writers, its great philanthropists. They take care of its ancient public buildings. They encourage all that keeps national virtues or national triumphs alive in the public mind. They celebrate anniversaries, centenaries; they make the most of occasions that enshrine the memories of the past. If thoughtful Americans visit this country, or other countries of Europe, what do they envy us? Not our fleets, not our commerce, not our great cities, not our free press and free political life, not our vigorous social struggles. In these things they are our rivals, they may easily become our superiors. They envy us that which they do not possess in any degree worth mentioning,—a national past. They envy us our old institutions, our old buildings, our old seats of learning, our traditions which span the Middle Ages and the times before them, our history of fifteen hundred years. We English are apt to think little of these things, but they cannot be created by energy or bought with money; they are the growth of ages; they are the gift of God. The American people will be a century old next July;[1] and a century does not go far towards accumulating the treasures of an historical past. In a century there is, as yet, scarcely room for the grave of Elisha.—What does the past do for a nation? It kindles a nation, when depressed by misfortune or degenerate through luxury, into new life. A great defeat, or a great failure, or a sensible decline in all that gives a nation moral vigour and self-respect, leads it, or its leading minds, to consider what their ancestors were,—what were the characters, the sacrifices, the actions by which their own declining greatness had been originally won. A degenerate posterity asks itself why, with the same blood flowing in its veins,

[1] This Sermon was preached in the spring of the year 1876.

it should be incapable of the virtues of its ancestors. The corpse of national life, the languid pulses of national thought, are brought into contact with the past; they touch the bones of Elisha, and the country may yet revive and stand again on its feet.

One great nation in modern times has seriously tried to dispense altogether with the past. In the first French Revolution an attempt was made to destroy all traces of fourteen centuries. The old buildings were destroyed; the old institutions were proscribed; the old literature was burned, or put on the shelf; even the old names for the divisions of time were banished from public and private life. It seemed eighty years ago as if the France of St. Louis had perished for ever, and a new people had arisen out of the soil which owed nothing except hatred to the traditions of its ancestry. But it could not be. Nature and Providence were not to be thus set at defiance. One by one, even before the Revolution had spent its force, the old names and habits and traditions of France resumed their empire. The past could not be expelled by force, except for a moment. The generation which had applauded Robespierre lived to be ecstatic about Chateaubriand.

(β) Observe the bearing of this principle on the history of Churches. To a Church the past is even more than to a nation: its title-deeds have been given once for all, and it had everything in the first age of its existence that it has now. The Sacred Scriptures are largely records of the past. The great saints and heroes of the Church have lived in the past. Its legislation, its literature, its missionary triumphs, its philanthropic efforts, strike their roots deep into the past—into ages of strong clear faith and earnest practical zeal. Its test of truth is that which was "always, everywhere, received by all." In practice and in thought a Church must endeavour

stare super antiquas vias[1]—to stand on the old paths;—the alternative is ruin.

Do I say that a Christian Church has no duties to the present,—no hopes and aspirations for the future? Far from it. It lives, works, breathes in the one; it has the promise, the certain promise of the other. But the past is, so to say, its capital. Its business is to call to mind God's wonders of old time[2]—not to hide them from the children of the generations to come, but to show the honour of the Lord, His mighty and wondrous works that He hath done.[3]

Churches—particular Churches—like nations, have their days of glory, and their days of depression and of shame. To the collective Church alone is the promise given that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.[4] In portions of the East and in Northern Africa, there were once flourishing Christian Churches which have ceased to exist. And many a Church which has not died outright has experienced decline of faith, and love, and zeal, and reverence, and all that makes it what it should be before God and humanity. The history of Christendom is full of these declensions; in which a corrupt spirit, such as lukewarmness, or misbelief, or irreverence, or worldliness, has possessed itself of a portion of the Church, and dimmed its eye and chilled its heart. This was the case in most of the European Churches before the Reformation. This has been conspicuously the case wherever a false pietism has undermined reverence for Christian antiquity, and so has made way for pure Rationalism. The upgrowth of an ecclesiastical tyranny, or the iron grasp of a civil government, may be equally fatal to that buoyancy of faith, that freedom of soul, that sense of the Unseen and the Eternal, that moral sensitiveness, that energy and productiveness

[1] Jer. vi. 16.
[2] Ps. lxxvii. 11.
[3] Ps. lxxviii. 4.
[4] St. Matt. xvi. 18.

in all that leads to heaven and is for the good of man, which is the life of a true Christian Church.

If a Church is stricken with the languor of death, it must be quickened in the old way,—by contact, new and earnest contact, under the guidance of the Spirit, with the sacred past. We may have heard perhaps of such a Church, which public opinion was already, some five-and-forty years ago, preparing for burial; while the band of Moabite spoilers was seen hovering, not indistinctly, in the distance—ready to sweep down upon the prey. Then by God's good providence it was thrust into the grave of Elisha: it was confronted sharply with its own past,—the past of Christendom. The real sense of Scripture, the majesty and pathos of the Apostolic Age, the great teachers later on, who ruled the thought of the undivided Church—Augustine, Jerome, Chrysostom, Athanasius,—those who tower so high above the diminished stature of any in our impoverished and divided Christendom,—these were for such a Church as the bones of Elisha. Out of that glorious past which, though it lies in its tomb, in our libraries and our museums, is, we know, imperishable, there was a power of life to stream forth into the intellect and heart and conscience of a Church which indifference, or irreverence, or misbelief, or half-belief, had so seriously enfeebled. It might now learn to believe in its mission from Heaven, in its Divine origin, in its glorious destinies. It might learn real faith in the Cleansing Blood, in the power of the Spirit, in the power of the Sacraments. Our Lord might become again to it, what He was to His Apostle, a Living Being, walking amidst the golden candlesticks.[1] Into the ear of such a Church He had whispered the Easter greeting in the Canticles: "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the

[1] Rev. i. 13.

time of the singing of birds is come. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away."[1]

If something has been done since then, something more remains. And whether, as a Church, our resurrection is to be complete, depends in no small degree upon the closeness of our contact in the years to come,—not with forms of opinion which have no faith in themselves, and no good to bring to suffering humanity,—but with the great treasures of the Christian past, with Holy Scripture, with the primitive ages, with the bones of Elisha.

(γ) Observe the application of this principle to the soul. Every Christian soul has its past, its sacred memories, known only to itself and to God. Like St. Paul, perhaps, it has at one time or another heard unspeakable things which it is impossible for a man to utter.[2] It has been close to God, possessed of His secrets, instinct with His Life. It has had its own invisible friends; its own hopes and fears; its own horizons on earth and in heaven. These things are not transferable. But besides these, it has had that devotion to our Divine Redeemer, Jesus, God and Man, Who gave His Life for all of us, that sense of the present energy of His Spirit, that value and reverence for the Sacraments, which are characteristic of a Christian. And above all, the moral results of the Christian life, —"love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance"[3]—these it has fostered in its garden, for the Holy Spirit has been there, and it is He Who gives the increase of such flowers and fruits as these.

But, like nations and churches, souls have their periods of depression, their epochs of growth and decline. There is no such thing as indefectible grace. We may forfeit God's grace, partly or wholly; and it is a mistake to think

[1] Song of Sol. ii. 10-13. [2] 2 Cor. xii. 4. [3] Gal. v. 22, 23.

that as we get older we necessarily get better. Many of us really get worse. Times of darkness, of deadness, of spiritual blindness come, even to tried and faithful servants of Christ. They no longer believe, hope, love, as they did once. They no longer pray as they did once. Conscience is left to take care of itself in a way which would have been impossible some years ago. God, the Holy Trinity, in that eternal, awful, and blessed Life; Jesus our Lord, God and Man; the loving and inspiring Spirit; the written Word of God; the Church—the home of souls; the Sacraments—the means of grace; the hope of heaven, the fear of hell: these things are no longer what they used to be to the soul. A deadness has come over it; phrases have taken the place of convictions; the eternal realities have been displaced in its affections by the things of time. It is in a fair way to die outright; it is carried out to be buried by the spirit of the world, or by the force of circumstances—when some danger, some illness, some heart-ache which convulses the depths of being, leads it to seek a retreat somewhere. The Moabites are in sight, and it is thrust into the tomb of Elisha. It is brought into contact with the buried past, with the years that had been as forgotten as if they had never been, with the thoughts that had once been uppermost, with the friends who have long since passed into another world. All that early time, which seemed to have perished utterly, is there buried away in the tomb of memory; and the discovery of an old letter, or a visit to an early home, or a conversation with a friend who has not been heard of for years may awaken it, as by a touch of the bones of Elisha.

> "Thou unrelenting Past!
> Strong are the barriers round thy dark domain;
> And fetters sure and fast
> Hold all that enter thy unbreathing reign.

Thou hast my better years;
Thou hast my earlier friends; the good, the kind—
Yielded to thee with tears—
The venerable form, the exalted mind.

Thine for a space are they;—
Yet shalt thou yield thy treasures up at last;
Thy gates shall yet give way,
Thy bolts shall fail, inexorable Past."

Oh wonderful awakening, in which what seemed to have perished is again before us; in which we again become in some measure what we were; in which the dead speak to us as if they were living; in which the ideas, the resolutions, the hopes, the habits of twenty years before, resume their sway, as with a life from the dead! This memory of the days of old and of the years that are past—this may be, this often is, nothing less than the very crisis of destiny, a true spiritual rising from the dead.

Brethren, let us turn our eyes towards the future; the future of our country, the future of our Church and of Christendom, the future,—the eternal future,—of our immortal souls. But do not let us forget the past. The past has a great place in God's government of the world, in His teaching of the Church, in His guidance of the soul. True, it teaches us sometimes by warning, sometimes by encouragement; but it is full of lessons, full of power, full of inspiration. Nay, the past belongs to God not less than the present and the future; for Him, the Eternal Mind, there is no succession, neither present, nor future, nor past. For us the past is so precious, because God does not change: He will be what He has been, what He is. It is He Who quickens through the bones of Elisha; it is His Thought, His Grace, His Beauty, by which all that is great in the past of humanity or of Christendom is really formed. In seeking it we seek Him; and as we

thus feel more and more that He has been our "Help in ages past," we are quickened by the conviction that He will be "our Help," too, "in years to come,"—

> "Our Refuge from the stormy blast,
> And our Eternal Home."

SERMON XXIII.

THE TRUE CONFIDENCE.

2 KINGS xviii. 19.

And Rabshakeh said unto them, Speak ye now to Hezekiah, Thus saith the great king, the king of Assyria, What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?

IN a question like this, it is at first difficult to say what, in the exact intention of the speaker, is the ruling motive. It may be conscious strength forcing a virtually conquered foe to bite the dust. It may be common-sense pleading with the false pride of a weak antagonist against the prolongation of a struggle which could only entail accumulated disaster.

Some years before, Sargon, king of Assyria, had carried away the ten tribes captive into a region of Central Asia; and of the old realm of David and Solomon only Judah remained. Sennacherib, the next Assyrian monarch, was bent upon completing the conquest of the whole of South-Western Asia, along the Mediterranean. Judah was to share the fate of Israel; and Sennacherib began by taking most of the fortified towns in Judah. And although, on hearing of the invasion (as is clear from the history of the Chronicles), Hezekiah, the Jewish king, had taken some effective measures of defence, his heart failed him on hearing of the siege of the important fortress of Lachish, the capture of which would have gone far to cut off retreat in the direction of Egypt. Hezekiah offered to submit, and to pay whatever sum the conqueror might ask.

In order to meet Sennacherib's demands, Hezekiah was obliged to strip the very door-posts of the temple of the golden plates with which in happier days he had overlaid them; for the treasury both of the temple and of the palace had been exhausted under the bad government of Ahaz. So, with every expression of abject submission, Hezekiah sent to the Assyrian monarch three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold.

Hezekiah sent the precious metals: but it was to no purpose. Sennacherib took the gold; but he had felt his strength, and he would put his foot on the neck of the giver. A strong body of troops was sent to Jerusalem, and encamped on the western side of the city. It was under the command of three generals, whose names imply that they held high positions at the Assyrian court. Tartan was simply a person in high office; Rabsaris—the word means this—was prince of the eunuchs; Rabshakeh was the chief cupbearer to the king. Like such titles as that of Lord Chamberlain at the English court, these distinctions were probably honorary, and were quite compatible with the fact that their bearers were military men whose services had been rewarded with the decorations which it was natural to bestow under an Eastern despotism.

Arrived at Jerusalem, the Assyrian generals asked for an interview with the king, to demand the surrender of the capital. Hezekiah kept to his palace; but he sent three commissioners to parley with the Assyrian leaders. These were the powerful Eliakim, master of the royal household; Shebna, who had formerly occupied Eliakim's place, and had been deposed for misconduct, but was still a kind of Secretary of State; and Joah, the son of Asaph, whose office it was to see to the keeping of the public registers.

It was to these highly-placed and responsible officers that

Rabshakeh—third in command of the Assyrian forces—addressed himself, well aware as he was that he was face to face with men who had the confidence of Hezekiah. The burden of Rabshakeh's address is the hopelessness of resistance on the part of Hezekiah. "Speak ye now to Hezekiah, Thus saith the great king, the king of Assyria, What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?"

I.

In what did Hezekiah trust? Hezekiah, it seems, had said that he had counsel and strength for the war; that he had wise heads and strong arms at his disposal who would carry him through it. But Rabshakeh will not even discuss this; it cannot have been meant seriously; "they are but vain words."[1] A moment's comparison of the resources of a little province like Judah with those of the vast Assyrian empire, would show that no man in his senses could have imagined that the Assyrian attack could really be beaten off by the unaided resources of Judah.

In what then did Hezekiah trust? Did he turn a wistful eye towards Egypt? It was the natural resource, the instinct of Jewish statesmen, in the later years of the falling monarchy. Egypt had already cast a mysterious spell on the imagination of the ancient world. Then, as now, she was a land of tombs, of buried memories, of gigantic monuments, recalling an extinct past to which there was nothing parallel elsewhere. She had been a great world-conquering power, and it was thought that her old prowess might return. She might yet rise to beat back—so it was hoped—the advancing invasion which was sweeping from the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates over the whole of South-Western Asia, and which, unless beaten back, would reach the Nile.

[1] 2 Kings xviii. 20.

In the prophets of Judah this project of an Egyptian policy met with determined opposition. They looked on it, as many great Englishmen looked on the French alliance in the reigns of the two last Stuarts, as at once delusive and demoralising. The Egyptian alliance brought with it special temptations to a relapse into idolatry, as was shown in the case of the remnant to which Jeremiah prophesied. Egypt had been the early home of the race of Israel, and there were subtle sympathies with Egyptian feeling and manners that were only too easily rekindled. But further, this confidence in a powerful heathen ally was virtually a denial of the protecting presence of the Lord Jehovah among the holy people: it was a denial of the creed which a later Psalmist sang—

"The Lord is on my side, I will not fear what man doeth unto me.

"It is better to trust in the Lord, than to put any confidence in man.

"It is better to trust in the Lord, than to put any confidence in princes.

"All nations compassed me round about, but in the Name of the Lord will I destroy them."[1]

Already therefore Isaiah had declared—

> "Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord,
> That take counsel, but not of Me;
> And that cover with a covering, but not of My Spirit:
> That they may add sin to sin:
> That walk to go down into Egypt,
> And have not asked at My mouth:
> To strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh,
> And to trust in the shadow of Egypt!
> Therefore shall the strength of Pharaoh be your shame,
> And the trust in the shadow of Egypt your confusion."[2]

And at a later date, Jeremiah uttered a solemn curse against the remnant of Judah, that had set themselves to

[1] Ps. cxviii. 6, 8-10. [2] Isaiah xxx. 1-3.

go down into Egypt to sojourn there. "They shall die," he said, "by the sword and by the famine, and they shall be an execration, and an astonishment, and a curse, and a reproach."[1] To the same purpose was his solemn prophecy against the army of Pharaoh-Necho at Carchemish, and his prediction of the ultimate conquest of Egypt by the victorious East.[2]

Rabshakeh, then, was clearly a well-informed and accomplished diplomatist, and he knew how to use his knowledge of a religion for which he would have himself entertained nothing but refined contempt. He takes up, for the time being, religious ground: his arguments run parallel to those of the greatest and holiest of the prophets. "Egypt," he says,—in later years Ezekiel used the very same metaphor—"Egypt is like one of the reeds of her native river, which has been bruised, while yet it seems whole and trustworthy. If a man lean on it, it goes into his hand and pierces him: so is Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to all that trust in him."[3] An Egyptian salvation from Assyria, if it were possible, would be the ruin of Judah,—the ruin of its independence, as well as the ruin of its faith.

What confidence, then, had Hezekiah? If he could not trust in his own resources, or in his only possible ally, did he trust a Higher Power in this hour of danger and shame? Rabshakeh could not believe that. Enough had been said of the religious reformation carried out by Hezekiah in his earlier years, to reach the Assyrian court. They had heard of the destruction of altars and high places, and they took it for granted that these destroyed altars were dedicated to the glory of the True God. Like people who have heard religion discussed in conversation, or have read controversy in newspapers, but who have never looked at religion by the light of a personal

[1] Jer. xliv. 12. [2] *Ib.* xlvi. 1-27. [3] 2 Kings xviii. 21; Ezek. xxix. 6.

experience, and felt its power, Rabshakeh formed a very false estimate of Hezekiah's loyalty to the faith of Moses, and could not suppose that he felt confidence in a God Whom he had apparently so dishonoured. "But if ye say unto me, We trust in the Lord our God: is not that He, Whose high places and Whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away, and hath said to Judah and Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem?"[1]

Rabshakeh spoke in Hebrew, and the king's commissioners begged that he would speak in his own Assyrian dialect, lest his challenge to Hezekiah should be understood by the soldiers who stood by. But this was precisely what Rabshakeh wanted: he was addressing, not merely the king, but the Jewish people. If Hezekiah was obstinate, he might be forced to come to terms by a popular rising. Accordingly Rabshakeh turned to the Jews who were near, and warned them that deliverance was impossible. They had better pay a tribute and wait peaceably where they were, until the Assyrian king might choose to transport them to another part of the empire. Above all, let them not listen to Hezekiah saying, "The Lord will deliver us."[2] Other nations had their protecting deities,—here the sarcasm of a sceptic is felt in the language of the envoy,—but had they been protected against the Assyrian arms? Rabshakeh names towns of whose fall the Jews had heard the tragic story, but of which history tells us little. The Syrian cities of Arpad and Hamath; Sepharvaim, in Southern Mesopotamia; Hena, on one of the fords of the Euphrates; Ivah—where were they? They had gone down before the conqueror whose host now stood before Jerusalem. Could Jerusalem expect to fare better than they?

Never was a question pushed home more relentlessly than that of Rabshakeh, "What confidence is this wherein

[1] 2 Kings xviii. 22. [2] *Ib.* 30.

thou trustest?" But Hezekiah had an answer to give, which, as the event proved, was sufficient. He did not trust in his own resources; he did not trust in Egypt. He had not forfeited the right to trust the Lord his God, since the very acts whereby Rabshakeh supposed him to have repudiated God were proofs of his jealous devotion to God's honour. And therefore he did trust the Lord God of Israel, even against appearances, —even when the storm of war hung ready to burst over his throne and capital, and there was no break in the clouds visible to the human eye. No doubt the Syrian and Mesopotamian cities had bent before the arms of Assyria: but that proved nothing, unless the worship of Jehovah was merely one among many religions more or less false, instead of being the only true. Hezekiah turned to the great prophet Isaiah for encouragement; and when Sennacherib sent a last letter of menace and blasphemy, before advancing to attack the Ethiopian king, Tirhakah, Hezekiah laid it before the Lord, in His own temple, in proof of his perfect and affectionate confidence, and as feeling that, after all, God's honour was more at stake than his own.[1] We all know how the prayer was answered: Hezekiah's confidence was not misplaced.

II.

Rabshakeh, with his prowess and his dialectical skill, has long since gone down to the dust with his forefathers. Probably he fell by the sword of Adrammelech and Sharezer, if he escaped the destruction of the Assyrian host. But his question lives. It is asked year after year, century after century, of societies of men and of individuals. And when it is asked of nations, the answer is very various. Sometimes it runs thus, "We trust in the

[1] 2 Kings xix. 1-19.

achievements of our forefathers;" as did Prussia in those of Frederick the Great, when she was crushed at Jena. Sometimes it is, "We trust in this or that new weapon, in this chassepot;" as did Prussia's old conqueror last year.[1] Sometimes it is, "We trust in our long immunity from attack, in our geographical position, in our well-known valour as a race." We hear that language too, my brethren, nearer home. But there is one only real ground of confidence,—a public conscience in a country which can trust God, because it acknowledges and fears Him. Where faith in God has been eaten out by national vice or widespread misbelief, the nerve of national strength is gone. No scientific progress, no political insight, no antiquarian sense of propriety, can give tone and vigour to a nation which has lost faith in God, and the moral power which that faith, and it alone, breathes into all departments of national life.

Like nations, the soul of man needs a something to rest on; it must have a confidence wherein to trust. It is, by its nature and structure, dependent. It must rest on something; if it have not a true support at hand, it will apply to a false. And life has its turning-points, when, at the summons of some Rabshakeh, the soul is forced to look its real source of confidence in the face—to determine what will and what will not enable it to face the future with calmness and hope. Especially does this question become inevitable at the approach of death. Death often takes us by swift surprise; but oftener death is preceded by disease,—the siege of the city which precedes the storm. We see the enemy coming; we see first one height occupied, then another; first this line of investment completed, then that. Day by day the works are pushed nearer to the walls; the assault cannot long be delayed. And then the question is borne in upon

[1] This Sermon was preached in the year 1871.

the besieged soul with awful power, "What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?"

(*a*) What confidence? In some cases, confidence in self. At least this is professed; and we are not wronging a view of human destiny which has its exponents at the present day, by thus adapting its language. "My ideal of human life," it is virtually said, "is that of the ancient Stoics. In life and in death they endeavoured above everything to preserve their self-respect in preserving their self-confidence. They crushed the moanings of fear and the insurrections of passion with the hand of a powerful will: and they died when and as they chose with majestic dignity. They repudiated that canine theory of life which bids man ever look fawningly upwards to a Higher Being, as does the dog to his master: and in their tranquil self-possession they present a higher ideal than that which is proposed by Christendom." Of this confidence it must be said that it is inconsistent with facts—as inconsistent as would have been that of Hezekiah had he relied on his own resources for resisting Sennacherib. It is inconsistent with recognition of the great fact of all facts,—God. If God be admitted to exist, as a Living, All-creating, All-upholding, All-surveying, All-judging Being, He cannot in reason be ignored, as He is ignored, by this tranquil confidence in self on the part of any of His creatures. But it is equally inconsistent with serious recognition of the facts of human nature. We are, whether we will it or not, dependent beings. We instinctively feel this, even before we discover it by observation and reasoning. Our hearts look out for a stay and support, before our understandings convince us that we need one. And they do convince us of this, by the mere experience of life, taken as a whole. The self-dependent man is an exception, an anomaly: he does not fairly represent human nature, any more than a standard

vine would represent the average nature of vine-trees. It is inconsistent, above all, this self-dependence, with the consciousness of sin. The consciousness of sin, more or less vivid, is proportionately weakness: the sinner feels the need of some one to cling to in order to save him from himself. And this consciousness of sin, man being what he is, is a part of the furniture of every truthful human soul. Not to have reached it, is to live in a cloud-land; to have got rid of it is to have put out the eye, to have cauterised the nerve, of the conscience. It is possible to do this; but it is only possible at the cost of an act of violence inflicted on the spiritual nature, from which a man need not be a Christian in order to shrink with unaffected dread.

The Stoic-confidence, therefore, which has appeared so worthy of imitation by certain thinkers in our day, is based on a false estimate of human life. It is liable to break up whenever that estimate is corrected. Whenever the great certainties—God, sin, an eternal future—become clearly present to the eye of the soul, the tranquil self-reliant pride of Stoicism must give way. It is only possible when the eternal world and its Master, and the laws which govern it, are, so to speak, screened off from view; and the Stoic, like a statuary or a dramatic artist, poses himself first in this attitude, then in that, to see how he will look in the distant perspectives of history. Stoicism was the recreation, or the accomplishment, of a body of generally highly placed and remarkable men: and the Stoics, on the whole, contrasted well with the average moral tone of their day, and said a great many fine things about it. But to humanity, with all its passion, its suffering, its eager aspirations, its profound discouragements, Stoicism said nothing. No mere scheme of moral proprieties can buoy up the spirit which has caught sight of God.

(β) Not seldom do men trust in Egypt—in something external to themselves, the strength or weakness of which they never examine, but which satisfies the need of trusting something.

Of this description is confidence in reputation. Reputation depends less on what we do and are than on what men think we do and are. Thus it is that so many deserving men have no reputation. Thus it is that so many undeserving men have great reputations. To win a reputation is by no means the same thing as to deserve it. Yet it often happens that when a man has somehow got it —got a reputation for general or specific ability, or for goodness,—he comes to view it as a substantial thing, which tells him the real truth about himself, and which may befriend him, as if it were a living friend in times of trouble. Of such a support it may be said, as of Egypt, in the words of Rabshakeh, that it is "a bruised reed, on which if a man lean, it will go into his hand and pierce him."[1] It will break up as suddenly, as capriciously, as it arose; it will in its collapse probably do an injustice in the way of depreciation; it will exact exorbitant interest for what it has lent of decoration or of support. History is full of reputations which have ornamented their possessors before piercing them: but history is as the voice of one crying in the wilderness, and each generation repeats the experience of its predecessor, as if it had nothing to start with.

Then there is confidence in income. No doubt money, while it lasts, is power: it is social power: it is political power: it is everything but moral power. And men instinctively fall back on it, as if after all it was the great reality, all else being a matter of sentiment and imagination; and they trust it. They do not look very far ahead; but they trust it for the present and for the next few years as a friend who will carry them on. Certainly,

[1] 2 Kings xviii. 21.

in spite of all precautions, it may be invested in bad securities—in funds liable to indefinite depreciation. It may be, like the property of so many wealthy families in France two years ago, dependent upon a politician over whom its holders have no real control. It may be dependent upon the contents of a stratum of soil, or upon the success of a dubious mechanical experiment, or upon the social credit of a particular neighbourhood, or upon the ability of this or that trusted agent under new and critical circumstances. Now, as of old, now, in these days especially, when property is so essentially artificial in its tenure, riches easily "make themselves wings and fly away."[1] Even if they last till death, they must be left behind them: no moneyed man "shall carry anything with him when he dieth, neither shall his pomp follow him."[2]

Then there is confidence in a happy home. Many men feel this who, as they say, do not aim high, and have no ambitions, and sincerely care little for money and lack of reputation. The world may say of them what it likes: they desire no more than what will meet their daily wants: but their hearts find repose, expansion, peace, in home. They turn to it from the rough experiences of public life, as to a tranquil and sacred retreat where their affections find full play, and where they are understood by and understand those about them. It is the craving for this which leads people to marry early; it is the sense of this which encourages many a man to work hard and late: this is his gleam of sunshine beyond the dark hours of weary toil. For such men this is enough: they do not look beyond. "They have children at their desire, and leave the rest of their substance unto their babes."[3] But who that knows anything of the tragic realities of life, sees not how easily this confidence may be misplaced?

[1] Prov. xxiii. 5. [2] Ps. xlix. 17. [3] *Ib.* xvii. 15.

How often has not a home been rendered desolate, emptied quite, by an epidemic fever? And then what must become of the heart which found in that home its all, and had no stay beyond? Even if all lasts till death, all must be left when we lie on our deathbeds. Our friends may accompany us along the dark valley, up to the last moment of consciousness: but at last we must leave them, and unless our hearts can trust Some Other we are lone indeed.

III.

Yes, this question points to the most fundamental necessity of the soul's life,—perfect, well-founded trust in the Being Who made it. Confidence in God and distrust of self; confidence in God, and sitting easily to reputation, to wealth, to the love of friends, to all that passes, to all that is not God,—this is the secret strength of the soul's life. This it is which makes great characters tender and strong: this it is which lifts men at once above the vicissitudes of circumstance into an atmosphere where they take counsel of One Friend and only One, and are rewarded accordingly by a sense of insurance against the future which nothing else can give. "Ah!" I hear it said, "your religious men sometimes find their confidence misplaced as well as other people." The world is ever asking triumphantly at the gate of Jerusalem, "Where are the gods of Hamath, and of Arpad, of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah?"[1] Doubtless there are plenty of counterfeits of true confidence in God: doubtless sooner or later all artificial faiths give way. The religion of mere speculation, the religion of mere sentiment, all religion which is not based and rooted in a firm hold on the Personal God, is a plaything for time: it is not part of the outfit for eternity. And few experi-

[1] 2 Kings xviii. 34.

ences can be more terrible than, at those supreme moments of the soul's life, to stretch out the hands to what has been deemed for years a religion, and find it melting away like a phantom into a blank,—into darkness. To trust God we must desire to know, love, serve Him, as if for the moment He and we were the only beings in the Universe: all else will follow. To know and reach Him really we must betake ourselves to Him Who said, once for all, "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me."[1] Knowledge of Jesus, love of Jesus, obedience to Jesus, trust in Jesus, union with Jesus, is union with, trust in, obedience to, love towards, knowledge of, God. Whosoever hath the Son hath the Father also: and our great business here, therefore, is to strengthen our confidence for eternity by becoming more and more devoted to, and intimate with, that ever living and gracious Saviour Who has taken our nature upon Him, and has shed His Blood for us, and intercedes for us in heaven, and gives us "the Bread which came down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world,"[2] and is "able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him."[3]

To those who know this—the sure ground of confidence—death, like Rabshakeh, may present his summons: but he finds them prepared. With St. Paul they exclaim, "I know Whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day."[4] With many a Christian martyr they take up the solemn strain of David, consecrated as one line of it was by the use of the Divine Redeemer Himself upon the Cross:—

"In Thee, O Lord, have I put my trust: let me never be put to confusion, deliver me in Thy righteousness.

"Bow down Thine ear to me: make haste to deliver me.

[1] St. John xiv. 6.
[2] *Ib.* vi. 33.
[3] Heb. vii. 25.
[4] 2 Tim. i. 12.

"And be Thou my strong rock, and house of defence: that Thou mayest save me.

"For Thou art my strong rock, and my castle: be Thou also my Guide, and lead me for Thy Name's sake.

"Draw me out of the net, that they have laid privily for me: for Thou art my strength.

"Into Thy hands I commend my spirit: for Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, Thou God of truth."[1]

To secure this humble yet strong trust in God is the great business of life. All that bears on it is incomparably more important than aught else; all that helps to rivet it more precious, all that weakens it more jealously to be shunned. Every day of our lives we are asked many questions which it is a mere loss of time to answer. But Rabshakeh's inquiry is never impertinent; we can never ask ourselves too earnestly what is the one fundamental fact on which our souls lean at this moment,—as their stay in life and death. All answers but one to that question will assuredly fail us; let us practically come closer and closer to Him Who enables us to answer it, because, "through death, He destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and delivered them who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage."[2]

[1] Ps. xxxi. 1-6. [2] Heb. ii. 14, 15.

SERMON XXIV.

JERUSALEM.

PSALM CXXII. 2.

Our feet shall stand in thy gates, O Jerusalem.

THE Psalm from which this verse is taken was probably written by a pilgrim to Jerusalem at some time previous to the Babylonish Captivity. On the one hand, it is clear that "the House of the Lord," the ancient temple, was still standing. On the other, the reference to "the house of David," and the anxious prayer for "the peace of Jerusalem," its "walls" and "palaces," seem to point to a later time than that of David. The pilgrim who composed the Psalm probably belonged to one of the ten separated tribes, but he had remained, after the general defection, true to the Divinely-ordered worship at Jerusalem; and his Psalm may have been composed on the occasion of his first visit. We observe in it his delight at the mere prospect of the journey; his ecstasy at finding himself, or at the thought of finding himself, within the sacred gates; his wonder at the aspect of the city, lying before him, probably, as he stood on the Mount of Olives; his sense of its ancient glories and of its present titles to honour,—the thrones of David and Solomon, the sacred Temple. But there are presages of coming trouble in the air; and as the Psalmist thinks of his brethren in the faith who live within its walls, and of the House of God which was its most prominent and precious feature, he offers a prayer

for the peace of the Holy City which had so large a place in his heart.

We must confine ourselves to his expression of delight at standing within the gates of Jerusalem: "Our feet stand"—so runs the original—"within thy gates, O Jerusalem." Possibly he had not yet reached it; in accordance with Hebrew usage, he treats a future, assumed to be certain, as if it were present; so that "our feet shall stand in thy gates," if not a literal translation, expresses the prosaic fact. But, however this may be, there is no question as to his enthusiasm; and he will himself partly enable us to explain it, while, in considering the use of his language, by other pilgrims during successive centuries, we must have recourse to considerations which belong to a later age and to a wider outlook than was his.

I.

Now one thing that would have struck a pilgrim to Jerusalem who should approach the city from its north-eastern side, would be its beauty. The modern world, no doubt, has analysed the idea of the picturesque: but the ancients also felt it. The pilgrim, who saw the city of Solomon lying at his feet, could not but exclaim, with the Psalmist of Hezekiah's time, after the discomfiture of Sennacherib, "The hill of Sion is a fair place, and the joy of the whole earth."[1] Even an Israelite of the date of the Captivity, whose eye rested on the ruins produced by the Chaldæan triumph, could not but mourn with Jeremiah, "Is this the city that men call the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth?"[2] The stately buildings erected by Solomon on the south side of the temple area; Solomon's own house; the house of judgment; the house of the forest of Lebanon; the palace of the kings on

[1] Ps. xlviii. 2. [2] Lam. ii. 15.

Zion; the palaces of the princes of Judah around it; the circuit of the walls: above all, the temple, with its courts, its burnished roofs, its lofty gates, its towers—surrounded, as these were on three sides, by deep ravines and olive-clad hills—would have delighted the visitor to Jerusalem in the days of Jehoshaphat or Hezekiah. The feature in the view which did seem to give especial pleasure was the compactness of the Holy City, doubtless as it was seen from the Mount of Olives. Thus the pilgrim of our Psalm exclaims: "Jerusalem is built as a city that is at unity with itself,"—that is compact together. This compactness was produced by the compression of the city between the deep valleys which surround it; especially those of Hinnom on the south, and of the Kedron or Jehoshaphat on the east—deep ravines, like those which run round Durham or Luxemburg, which arrested the extension of the city on three sides, while the same effect was long produced by the fortifications which were necessary to guard against the approach of an enemy from the north and north-west.

Possibly the pilgrim had seen Damascus, straggling out amid the beautiful oasis which surrounds it in the plain of the Abana; or Memphis, a long strip of buildings thickly populated, extending for some twelve or fourteen miles along the western bank of the Nile. Compared with these, Jerusalem had the compact beauty of a highland fortress; its buildings, if seen from below, standing out against the clear Syrian sky, and conveying an impression of grace and strength that would long linger in the memory.

No doubt, in the eyes of a religious pilgrim, even in Jewish times, the physical beauty of Jerusalem would have suggested and blended with a beauty of a higher order. Men look with new eyes at walls and towers and streets and edifices on which a Heavenly Presence is

believed to rest; or with which they have religious associations. To some of us here, perhaps, a humble village church with no pretensions to beauty, or a place of worship in some dusky by-street of this metropolis, is gilded with a radiance that we cannot discern in the grandest cathedral, because it is associated with moments of our spiritual history that we can never forget. The beauty of the world of spirits imparts to the world of sense a subtle lustre, which of itself it could never possess. "Walk about Sion, and go round about her: and tell the towers thereof. Mark well her bulwarks, set up her houses: that ye may tell them that come after." Why? "For this God is our God for ever and ever: He shall be our Guide unto death." [1]

II.

Secondly, Jerusalem was the centre of the religious and national life of Israel. This only became fully recognised during the reign of Solomon: and it was the great object of Jeroboam to efface, if he could, this supremacy of Jerusalem by the new civil capital at Shechem, and the new centres of worship at Dan and Bethel. But when Jeroboam had done his best, or his worst, religious men still went up to Jerusalem at the great festivals, from Ephraim and Manasseh, from Naphtali and Zebulun, no less than from Judah and Benjamin. "Thither," cries the pilgrim, "the tribes go up, even the tribes of the Lord; to testify unto Israel, to give thanks unto the Name of the Lord." [2]

For Israel, as the people of Revelation, was at once a civil society and a church; the two were not then essentially distinct, as has been and is the case in Christendom. And Jerusalem was the centre of Israel's civil life. "For

[1] Ps. xlviii. 11-13. [2] *Ib.* cxxii. 4.

there," sings the pilgrim, "are set thrones of judgment: even the thrones of the house of David"[1]—the ancient and venerable tribunals from which the successors of David and Solomon had dispensed justice during successive generations. Jerusalem was now the capital of a small State; but there lingered around its walls and palaces memories of the time when its sovereigns ruled from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates.

And Jerusalem was much more than the civil heart of Israel: it was its religious centre: its greatest distinction was that the temple lay within its walls. "He chose the tribe of Judah, even the hill of Sion which He loved; and there He built His temple on high, and laid the foundation of it like the ground which He hath made continually."[2] No other title to glory and distinction, in those ancient days, could compete with this—"the place which God did choose to put His Name there."[3] The deepest prayer in the true Israelite's heart, wherever he might live, ran thus: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, which I will require: even that I may dwell in the House of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the fair beauty of the Lord, and to visit His temple."[4] Its stately beauty, its ordered course of services, its awful sanctions, its precious associations, gathering volume year by year, with the deepest sympathies of successive generations—made the temple, for pious Israelites, unlike any other place on earth. Jerusalem was what it was in a good Israelite's eyes less on its own account, than because it contained the temple. "Yea," cries the pilgrim, as he looks out on the fair city beneath him, "Yea, because of the House of the Lord our God, I will seek to do thee good."[5]

And so, although the city of Solomon and its temple passed away, and a new city and a new temple rose upon

[1] Ps. cxxii. 5. [2] *Ib.* lxxviii. 69, 70. [3] Deut. xii. 5, 11; xxvi. 2.
[4] Ps. xxvii. 4. [5] *Ib.* cxxii. 9.

the ashes of the old, pilgrims still came up with the old Psalm upon their lips and in their hearts: "Our feet shall stand in thy gates, O Jerusalem."

III.

A third characteristic of Jerusalem, which appealed to religious visitors like this psalmist-pilgrim, was—if I may so phrase what I mean—its unworldliness.

This appears partly in its situation. It was not on the sea, or on a navigable river: the little stream of the Kedron was dry for the greater part of the year in ancient days as now, and nothing but rude mountain-paths connected the city with Egypt on one side, or with Syria on the other. It was thus cut off from all those activities of commerce and intercourse with distant countries which are essential to the material wellbeing and development of a great capital. Solomon, in all his glory, never dreamed of changing the site, though he was keenly alive to the advantages of a merchant navy, and did his best to encourage one in the distant port of Ezion-Geber on the Red Sea. But Isaiah rejoices in describing Zion, "the city of our solemnities," as "a quiet habitation," "wherein shall go no galley with oars; neither shall gallant ship pass thereby:"[1] in his eyes its religious character as well as its security are ensured by this seclusion from the great highways of the world of his day. Contrast Solomon and Isaiah with Herod—a clever man of the world, who viewed religious interests as one department of the game of politics. Certainly Herod completed the second temple on a magnificent scale; and he built for himself a handsome palace on the western side of the Holy City. But if Jewish feeling demanded these concessions, Herod felt that the real capital of such a realm as he aspired to rule had better be

[1] Isaiah xxxiii. 20, 21.

down on the shore of the Mediterranean, as was Cæsarea. Cæsarea was what its name suggests—a smaller Rome. Its baths, theatres, temples, public places, were in keeping with the Roman idea of civic life: above all, its situation placed it in immediate contact with the other great centres of civilisation and trade. When we consider what Cæsarea was, and what Jerusalem was not, we understand what I have called the unworldliness of the site of the city of David.

And this characteristic may be further illustrated by the smallness of Jerusalem. It was a small capital for the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin: it was astonishingly small to be the metropolis of such an empire as that of Solomon. And its smallness was not accidental; no large capital could have existed in such a situation. As we have already seen, Jerusalem was bounded on three sides by deep valleys or ravines, while the fourth had to be strongly fortified. When Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem in the days of Jehoiakim, there were less than twenty thousand inhabitants in it altogether. When Titus took Jerusalem, the addition of the third wall had greatly increased the area of the city: but the six hundred thousand whom terror and zeal had gathered around or within its walls were largely the population, not of the city itself, but of the adjoining districts. In point of size Jerusalem would ill bear comparison with our larger London parishes —Marylebone or Islington: it would seem insignificant, indeed, by the side of any European capital. It covers at this moment a larger area than was included within the walls in the days of Solomon, or in those of our Lord, although not so large as at the date of the siege of Titus. But as it is, you can walk round it without much fatigue before breakfast.

What does this teach us, but the old lesson that material size has nothing to do with the highest influences that

bear upon the life of man? No city in the world has so profoundly influenced the highest life of millions of the human race as has Jerusalem. London, New York, Paris, are magnificent in their way,—vast centres of material civilisation, with here and there a feeble witness for that which transcends matter. They are magnificent in their way, but in all that touches the highest thoughts and the deepest motives to action known to us men, they are insignificant indeed by comparison with that little highland town in a remote province of the empire of Turkey. Certainly, they do not suggest to any inspired Evangelist in his sublimest moments, the vision of a heavenly city: they have many attractions, but they do not draw to themselves those highest sympathies which are intent upon the kingdom of spirit. We quiet Englishmen, surveying our own metropolis, are not tempted to indulge in the transcendental rhapsodies which Victor Hugo has lavished upon Paris; we read his effusions in cold blood; perhaps we smile at them as somewhat unsuited to an age of common-sense. But if we are wise, we do not smile at the ecstasies of prophets and psalmists before that holier though much smaller city in the East. For the measurements of the realm of matter afford no clew whatever to the measurements of the realm of spirit; and elect souls will go on crying to the end of time, with an ever-deepening meaning in their words: "Our feet shall stand in thy gates, O Jerusalem."

IV.

Once more, as the centuries went on, Jerusalem, thus dear to the heart of Israel, as being what it was in itself, became yet more endeared to it by misfortune. Of all that is most beautiful in life sorrow is the last consecration. Sorrow is the poetry no less than the discipline of humanity.

Scarcely had the great sovereign who did so much for the magnificent city of Jerusalem been laid in his grave, when the Egyptian king Shishak captured it from his foolish son Rehoboam and despoiled the palace and the temple. A century passed; and the temple was again plundered by an incursion of Southern Arabian and Philistine tribes.[1] Sixty years later, after the defeat of Amaziah, Jehoash, king of Israel, entered Jerusalem as a conqueror, and stripped the temple and the palace of all the gold he could find.[2] The city must have suffered severely from the great earthquake in the time of Uzziah. It escaped, as we know, the destruction threatened by Sennacherib, but the new fortifications with which it was surrounded by Manasseh, after his return from Babylon, did not avert its impending fate. Nebuchadnezzar entered the city, pillaged the temple and the royal palace, and carried King Jehoiakim and ten thousand captives to Babylon. Not long after, the remaining Jews, under Zedekiah, revolted; and after a siege of a year and five months, Jerusalem was again taken: whatever was valuable that remained was carried to Babylon, the temple was burnt, and the entire city laid in ruins.

We know something of the feelings of pious Jews at this dreadful time, not only from the Lamentations of Jeremiah, but also from a Psalmist who, concealed probably in some cellar or other place of refuge, watched the brutal ravages of the conquerors, and the progress of destruction, and poured out in poetry all the anguish of his heart.

"O God, the heathen are come into Thine inheritance: Thy holy temple have they defiled, and made Jerusalem an heap of stones. The dead bodies of Thy servants have they given to be meat unto the fowls of the air: and the flesh of Thy saints unto the beasts of the land."[3]

[1] 2 Chron. xxi. 17. [2] *Ib.* xxv. 23, 24. [3] Ps. lxxix. 1, 2.

"Thine adversaries roar in the midst of Thy congregations: and set up their banners for tokens. He that hewed timber afore out of the thick trees, was known to bring it to an excellent work. But now they break down all the carved work thereof, with axes and hammers. They have set fire upon Thy holy places: and have defiled the dwelling-place of Thy Name, even unto the ground."[1] And so when the work of ruin was complete, another Israelite cries, as if breaking a silence which had long been imposed on him by suffering or by reverence: "Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Sion: for it is time that Thou have mercy upon her, yea, the time is come. And why? Thy servants think upon her stones, and it pitieth them to see her in the dust."[2] And this feeling of attachment to Jerusalem, ever deepening in proportion to her misfortunes, is perhaps most passionately expressed by the psalmist of the waters of Babylon: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth: yea, if I prefer not Jerusalem in my mirth."[3]

Undoubtedly the author of our Psalm would already have seen in Jerusalem the pathos and dignity which often comes with suffering; and those who used his Psalm in later ages would have felt increasingly this element of the attraction of the Holy City.

After the Exile it rose from its ruins but slowly. It was really rebuilt through the energy of Nehemiah, the favourite cupbearer of the Persian king Artaxerxes Longimanus. The next great event in its history was the plunder of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes on his return from Egypt, and the subsequent destruction of the city itself by his chief collector of taxes. Twice afterwards, Jerusalem was forced by hunger to capitulate to Syrian armies: and then came the first Roman Conquest; the slaughter of twelve

[1] Ps. lxxiv. 5-8. [2] *Ibid.* cii. 13, 14. [3] *Ibid.* cxxxvii. 5, 6.

thousand Jews within the temple precincts; the profanation of the sanctuary by Pompey; the plunder of the treasury by Crassus; the second capture of the city by Herod, with the aid of the Romans, resulting in another massacre. All through these ages the pilgrims sang with ever-increasing enthusiasm, "Our feet stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem." The immense sorrows of the Sacred City did but press its very stones more closely to their hearts. At last a destruction came that seemed to be final, and, in the late summer of the year A.D. 70, after a siege the horrors of which are almost unparalleled in history, Jerusalem was laid once more in the dust by the legions of Titus—so utterly in the dust, that for half a century its very site was deserted.

Certainly, if one thing is clear from Scripture and from experience, sorrows such as those of Jerusalem are the result of sin. Jeremiah was never weary of pointing out the connection: "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Behold, I will bring upon this city . . . all the evil that I have pronounced against it, because they have hardened their necks, that they might not hear My words."[1] "For who shall have pity on thee, O Jerusalem? or who shall bemoan thee? or who shall go aside to ask how thou doest? Thou hast forsaken Me, saith the Lord, thou art gone backward: therefore will I stretch out My Hand against thee, and destroy thee; I am weary with repenting."[2] "But go ye now to My place that was in Shiloh, where I set My Name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of My people Israel. And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the Lord, . . . therefore will I do unto this House, which is called by My Name wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh."[3]

And this did but anticipate the words of One greater

[1] Jer. xix. 15. [2] *Ib.* xv. 5, 6. [3] *Ib.* vii. 12-14.

far than Jeremiah in a later age: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."[1] And yet this tradition of sin, continued from age to age; this perpetual rebellion against God and light; this idolatry, and cruelty, and licentiousness; this scornful, shallow, thankless spirit, which flaunted its vulgar insolence in the very Face of the Eternal Mercy, could not kill out the sense of blessing which attached to the sacred spot in the eyes of successive generations of pilgrims. Thinking only of "the sure mercies of David,"[2] again and again,—under Manasseh as under Hezekiah, under Jehoiakim as under Josiah,—they uttered their song, "Our feet stand in thy gates, O Jerusalem."

The events which make Jerusalem what it is in Christian eyes do not belong to the Old Testament. That wonderful self-manifestation of the Eternal Being among men, which began at Bethlehem and Nazareth, reached its climax at Jerusalem. On the hills around this favoured city, along its streets, in the courts of its great sanctuary, there walked in visible human form One Who was from everlasting, and Who had folded around His Eternal Person the body and soul of the sons of men. Just outside its walls He condescended to die in agony and shame, only that He might rise in triumph from the grave; and on a hill hard by He went visibly up to heaven, to reign for ever in glory. The Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ confer upon Jerusalem a distinction before which all its other titles to interest and honour utterly pale; and when He

[1] St. Matt. xxiii. 37, 38. [2] Isa. lv. 3.

termed it "the City of the Great King,"[1] and when, foreseeing its approaching ruin, He shed tears at the sight of its walls and towers,[2] He conferred on it, in Christian eyes, a patent of nobility which will only become invalid when His Gospel disappears from among men.

(*a*) But the Jerusalem of Christian thought is no longer only or mainly the city of David. It is, first of all, the visible and Catholic Church of Christ. The towers and walls and shrines of the ancient city, as faith gazes on them, melt away into the outlines of a sublimer prospect —that of redeemed humanity, through all the Christian centuries, gathered and organised into a City of God. This was what St. Paul meant when, writing to the Galatians, he contrasted with "Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children," "the Jerusalem which is above"—or, as we should say, the spiritual Jerusalem,—which "is free, and is the mother of us all."[3] That vast society, in whose ample bosom the souls of Christian men from generation to generation find shelter, and welcome, and warmth, and nourishment, is the reality of which the Syrian city was the material type. This is the Jerusalem of the Christian Creed:—"I believe in One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church." This is the Jerusalem of perhaps the greatest work of the greatest teacher of the Christian Church since Apostolic days—Augustine's treatise "Of the City of God." There may be controversies among Christians as to the exact direction and extent of its walls, just as there are controversies among antiquarians as to the extent and direction of the walls of its material prototype. But as to its place in the thoughts and affections of a Christian man, there should be no room for controversy. No other association of men can have such claims upon the heart of a Christian as the Church of God. What if sin and division have marred its beauty

[1] St. Matt. v. 35. [2] St. Luke xix. 41-44. [3] Gal. iv. 25, 26.

and its unity? The old Jerusalem did not cease to be Jerusalem in Jeremiah's eyes, because of the sins of priests, princes, and people, which he so unsparingly denounced. The factions which rent the city that fell beneath the legions of Titus did not kill out the love and loyalty of its vanquished sons. The true remedy for disappointment and sorrow on the score of shortcomings and differences within the Sacred City is to be found in the prayer that we offer in our holiest service to the Divine Majesty; beseeching Him to "inspire continually the Universal Church with the spirit of truth, unity, and concord."[1] "O pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee,"[2] is surely not less meant for Christians than for Jews. Christians who, with the Apostle, have good reason to believe that in membership of the Christian Church they have indeed "come unto Mount Sion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, and to Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant,"[3] have good reason to cry with a new and more intelligent thankfulness than the pilgrim of old: "Our feet stand in thy gates, O Jerusalem."

(β) And the earthly Jerusalem suggests another City—a true Vision of Peace—with which the visible Church of Christ is already in communion, and into which all those true children of Zion who are joyful in their King,[4] will one day be received.

"And one of the seven angels," says the Evangelist, "carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the Holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the Glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. . . .

[1] Cf. the Prayer for the Church Militant, in the Order of the Holy Communion. [2] Ps. cxxii. 6. [3] Heb. xii. 22, 24. [4] Ps. cxlix. 2.

"And the city lieth four-square: . . . and the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. . . .

"And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the Glory of God did lighten it; and the Lamb is the light thereof.

"And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it. . . .

"And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. . . .

"And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie; but they which are written in the Lamb's Book of Life."[1]

May God of His great Mercy grant that many of us here present to-day, whose eyes have never rested on the city in which David reigned, and hard by which our Lord was crucified, may meet hereafter in that City above; that through the Grace and Mercy of our Divine Saviour we may enter its precincts, if not as saints, yet as accepted penitents; and that as our hearts rise up in a thankfulness too deep and too strong for words, to the Throne of the All-Merciful, our lips may yet utter the song—ancient, but new: "Alleluia!—our feet stand in thy gates, O Jerusalem."

[1] Rev. xxi. 10, 11, 16, 19, 22-27.

SERMON XXV.

THE SILENCE OF BABYLON.

Ps. cxxxvii. 4.

How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

EVERYBODY must see that this Psalm belongs to a later age than that of David. It is one of several Psalms that were really written about the time of the Babylonish Captivity; but no one of these has its date so visibly stamped upon it as this. It must have been composed just after the return to the Holy City by a writer whose mind was still full of the horrors of the Exile. One incident among others stands out with vivid clearness in his memory. The captive Israelites had been wont to sit on the banks of the rivers which watered the country of their conquerors, gazing at the mighty stream which rolled on through that vast plain:—perhaps they saw in it an image of the ever-advancing stream of time, which was bringing the hour of their deliverance nearer and nearer. It was on the banks of two of these rivers, the Hiddekel or Tigris, and the Chebar, that Daniel and Ezekiel beheld their great visions. And now less famous persons, such as this nameless Psalmist and his companions, some of whom had probably been members of the temple choir, or had learnt its melodies, had crept out of the narrow and thronged streets of the great city, and had betaken themselves to the resort of their countrymen on the river-bank. There they sat, during the long hours of the hot Eastern day,

silently watching the eddies of the ever-advancing waters; and their thoughts naturally wandered off to that far distant home, and that dearly loved sanctuary which was now lying waste and desolate, and from which they had been torn by their ruthless conquerors. When they thought of Zion, so unlike the scene before them, of Zion with its surrounding hills and its gentle brooks, with its dear and cherished memories, and its sanctities hallowed by the reverence of ages, they could no longer command themselves—they wept. High upon the willows which grew along the river-banks they hung up their harps—instruments these which, as being traditionally devoted to the expression of joy, had no longer any use in the sad days that had come upon them. They hung up their harps high out of reach and out of sight, lest, seeing them, the oppressor should repeat his request that his captives would cast aside their sorrow, and would sing the old consecrated melodies which they had neither mind nor heart to sing in Babylon.

> "For they that carried us away captive
> Required of us a song;
> And they that wasted us
> Asked for mirth,
> Saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion."[1]

The temple music had a reputation even among the heathen peoples of Central Asia; and just as the sacred vessels of the temple were employed to decorate the sideboards of the Babylonian monarchs, so it seemed to the conqueror natural and in order that the sacred words and music which had for ages set forth the worship of the One True God should furnish a more refined amusement to the cultivated Pagans who had trodden down His Sanctuary and had enslaved His people. It seemed natural, I say, to the heathen themselves; but the heart of what

[1] Ps. cxxxvii. 3.

was still best in captive Israel beat true to what was due to the honour of God, and to the memories of their ancient worship:

> "How shall we sing the Lord's song
> In a strange land?
> If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,
> May my right hand forget its skill to strike the chords!
> If I remember thee not,
> May my tongue cease to sing, and cleave to my mouth;
> If I prefer not Jerusalem
> Above all that charms me most." [1]

Nay! this request of the heathen oppressor that the captives should sing the Lord's song for his æsthetic gratification, rouses the Psalmist to a sterner mood. His thought passes back to "the day of Jerusalem," that sad and never-to-be-forgotten day, when the city and temple were sacked and burned by the army of Nebuchadnezzar. He cannot forget how, in those dark hours, a race of kinsfolk by blood had cheered on the heathen foe in his work of destruction—how the children of Edom, in the day of Jerusalem, said, "Down with it! down with it! even to the ground." [2] He cannot forget that Babylon then showed itself in its true light as the implacable enemy of God's kingdom upon earth; and in no spirit of personal or national vengeance, but as the exponent of a Divine sentence, he predicts her ruin. Already he sees the approaching capture of the city by Darius Hystaspes; Babylon is before his eyes, wasted with misery, as he gazes on her; she is herself served as she had served her conquered provinces; her young children are dashed against the stones by the Persian invader.[3] But, meanwhile, if the Psalmist is asked to prostitute his gift by singing the old temple songs to amuse the heathen, there are many reasons which make compliance impossible. "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"

[1] Ps. cxxxvii. 4-6. [2] *Ib.* 7. [3] *Ib.* 8, 9.

I.

"The Lord's song!" That is what the Psalmist could not sing for the gratification of his Babylonian masters. To Babylon it was only a question of singing the "songs of Sion." These "songs," it was thought, were what the children of Sion might rightly contribute to the amusement of the empire-city. Each conquered province had its speciality; and Judæa might just as well bring what it had to yield, as did others. Evidently "the songs of Sion" meant one thing to the Babylonian hearer, another to the captive Psalmist. To the Psalmist they were parts of a sacred worship. Their language was sacred; Moses, David, Solomon, Asaph, and, more lately, Jeremiah, had contributed to it. The ideas were sacred: the true God, His gracious revelation of Himself to Israel, the honour due to Him, the danger of neglecting Him—these were the subjects of Israel's songs. The very music was sacred; it was as old, probably, as the time of Solomon; it had already been hallowed by the use of centuries; it was bound up with the tenderest emotions and associations of many generations. "The Lord's song" meant for Israel all that was precious to the soul: but for the Babylonians it meant merely entertainment,—a newly imported curiosity, a new sensation in the world of art. There was nothing common to Israel and Babylon in their way of looking at it.

"The Lord's song!" Any ancient hymn of king or prophet which had passed into the service of the sanctuary bore that name. There is one prayer, with which no other may compare, and which alone in Christendom bears the name of "the Lord's Prayer." But there is, at least on earth, no one psalm or hymn which bears the name of "the Lord's song." Whatever may be the case with the new song of the everlasting future, the religious hymnody

of earth is and always has been almost infinitely varied in its expression. And yet at bottom it is one—one in its motive, one in its spirit and effect—one in its moral atmosphere. "The Lord's song!" What is it but the ascent of the soul towards the infinite and the eternal; the upward bound of the understanding, the expansion of the affections, the effort of faith, and hope, and love to utter themselves in praise; although the words, the languages, the rhythms, the melodies be most dissimilar? This, the true song of the Lord, springing out of the heart of the people of revelation, and embodying its creed in poems of the most varied age and character,—this it was which could not be uttered for the gratification of pagan Babylon without profanity.

"The Lord's song!" If it had only been the old poetry of the Hebrews, only their ancient music, they might perhaps have consented to render it before a Babylonian audience. But for the Jews language was a much more sacred thing than, I fear, it is to us of the modern world. The Jews did not conceive of language as a something which might be stripped off thought, like bark off a tree; for them thought and language always went together. It is, alas! easy for us to utter or to hear in a concert-room the most sacred language, as if it meant nothing, and were only a sort of padding to the music; but this degradation—for such it is—would have been impossible in a more serious and simple age. The Hebrews could not use their old sacred poetry without thinking of what it meant as real: it was the outcome of their vivid faith in the One True God. The whole soul of the Hebrew singers went with it: "the Lord's song" sounded through the corridors of the soul before it took shape in language and resounded beneath the vaults of the temple. And this sense of its reality made it impossible for a good Jew to prostitute it for the benefit of a Pagan audience, who would think of it as merely a new sensation in art.

"The Lord's song!" Yes! That meant for Israel consecrated art. This is the privilege of art, that it may be hallowed to a Divine purpose. Poetry, music, painting, architecture—all have their place in the sanctuary of God. And what has been once given to Him is His; His irrevocably; His for ever. The consecrated building cannot be given back to earthly uses without doing Him dishonour. And the poetry or music which has been dedicated to Him, and which has lifted souls up to Him for many a generation, cannot be divested of its sacred purpose and made the amusement of an infidel audience without wounding Him to Whom it also was offered by the faith and love of the gifted dead.

II.

The Psalmist cannot sing that song because he is in "a strange land." Let us dwell on that expression: it reveals the motive of the Psalmist's silence.

It will show us what the motive of the Psalmist's silence is not. It is not sulkiness, moodiness, a determination to inflict upon the Babylonian master such disappointment as is still in the power of a captive and a slave. It is not a subtle pride—the pride of race heightened by the pride begotten of failure; which will not accept an invitation to add something to the brightness and interest of Chaldæan life. Nor is it an unreasonable coyness, like that of Queen Vashti, when, on a great public occasion, she declined the duties of her position at the court of Ahasuerus.[1] Vashti was thinking of herself: the Psalmist, as we shall see, of One infinitely greater.

1. "A strange land!" This was apparent, first of all, in the difference of language. Although the Babylonian tongue had affinities with the Hebrew, it was practically,

[1] Esther i. 10-12.

for the Jews, a foreign language. We know how it affects us when we first go abroad, to hear another than our mother tongue being talked all around us. It produces, at first, a strange sense of isolation; and this must have been deepened, in the case of the Jews, by the fact that they certainly did not go to Babylon for their own satisfaction. How much this one circumstance impressed the Jews is plain from the allusions in the prophets. "A people of a deeper speech than thou canst perceive," was, according to Isaiah,[1] one of the dreaded terrors of the Captivity: and Ezekiel is encouraged to set out on his unwelcome mission to the captive Israelites by being told that he is not sent "to many people of a strange speech, and of a hard language, whose words thou canst not understand."[2] In time, no doubt, the captive Jews learnt much of the language of their conquerors, and brought it back with them to Palestine: but at first it was a barrier between them. And this would, of itself, have made them unwilling to sing "the Lord's song" in their own Hebrew to strangers who could not even follow it.

"A strange land!" Does not a Christian find himself in it when he finds himself among people to whom the language of the Christian creed and of the Christian heart is unknown—to whom that language even sounds like an unwelcome and repulsive jargon? The language of religion is and must be unintelligible to those who do not share the faith and the feelings which prompt it. "The natural man perceiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."[3] And the sense that this is the case makes a Christian, in general society, often retire into himself, lest he should break his Master's precept against giving that which is holy unto the dogs, or casting the pearls of Heaven before swine.[4] If the soul is to sing the Lord's

[1] Isa. xxxiii. 19 [2] Ezek. iii. 6. [3] 1 Cor. ii. 14. [4] St. Matt. vii. 6.

song with the lips as well as with the heart, it must be among those who speak its own language. They rouse its deepest sympathies into active expression; they follow and sustain and stimulate it. "My praise is of Thee in the great congregation; my vows will I perform in the sight of them that fear Him." [1]

2. "A strange land!" Babylon was the land of material wealth, of public and private magnificence. Everything in it was on a large scale, especially when compared with Palestine. According to Herodotus, the extent of the outer circuit of its walls was about fifty-six miles, and these walls were strengthened by some two hundred and fifty towers. It was entered by a hundred gates; the gates themselves were made of brass, with brazen lintels and side-posts. The great river Euphrates flowed through it; and the quays on each side were of vast extent and beauty. The two buildings in it of commanding splendour were the temple of Belus or Bel, and the royal palace. Both had been rebuilt by Nebuchadnezzar on a splendid scale; his name is read at this hour on the inscribed bricks and the sculptured fragments which remain.

According to one account,[2] the palace extended to both sides of the Euphrates: its separate parts were connected by a bridge, and by a tunnel under the bed of the river; while the towers round it rose to the height of some four hundred and twenty feet, that is to say, sixty feet higher than the cross of St. Paul's. Nor may we forget the hanging gardens of Nebuchadnezzar, rising in terraces one above another, and—whatever is to be said in detail as to their dimensions—certainly constructed on a very magnificent scale.

All this splendour was quite new to the captive Jews: they had left nothing like it behind them in Palestine. The palace of the descendants of Solomon was a very

[1] Ps. xxii. 25. [2] Ctesias.

small building when compared with the vast edifice in coloured brick, covered with emblems of Ninus and Semiramis, which was the home of the Babylonian monarch. The scale of the Babylonian court, of the army, of the public works, was imperial. Jerusalem was by comparison an insignificant provincial town; or, at best, like those little German towns which until lately had independent courts, when they are compared with Vienna or Paris. The literal sense of the words "Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty,"[1] must have forced itself on the captives at their first sight of Babylon. Babylon was the great world-city of the age. Babylon had its attractions, no doubt; but it was not the place in which to sing "the Lord's song." That song proclaimed in its very earliest notes—witness the Psalm of Moses, *Domine, refugium*[2]—the insignificance of this human life at its best, the poverty and perishableness of all that belonged to time. The soul of man is, after all, finite. And when it is filled with this world, there is no room for the next. To live for the material is to lose hold on the spiritual. Where the pride of life flourishes in rank luxuriance, the finer aspirations of the soul have not much, if any, chance. The very sight of a splendour which belongs only to time exerts a repressive influence upon the spiritual faculty; and as the pious Jews gazed on the worldly magnificence of their conquerors, they saw in it only a snare and a danger. "Turn away mine eyes, lest they behold vanity, and quicken me in Thy way. The law of Thy mouth is dearer unto me than thousands of gold and silver. I see that all things come to an end, but Thy commandment is exceeding broad."[3]

We could not ourselves well sing the *Gloria in Excelsis* in the Stock Exchange or in a West-End club: and the Jews felt that Babylon was not the place for singing the

[1] Isa. xxxiii. 17. [2] Ps. xc. [3] *Ib.* cxix. 37, 72, 96.

song of the Lord, which had been the joy and glory of their ancient sanctuary.

3. "A strange land!" Babylon was a land in which life was overshadowed by a vast idolatry. What this idolatry was, we may see in part on a visit to the British Museum. There are to be seen, at this hour, figures and inscriptions which might have been gazed on by the writer of this very Psalm, and which show how the Baal-worship which in different forms prevailed from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean, was the most striking feature of the life of the imperial races which conquered Palestine. To this hour the ruins of what was the great temple of Belus within the city, and of the temple of Birs-Nimrud without, show how powerfully this idolatry must have addressed itself to the senses of the people. And the same conclusion is warranted by the anxious warnings of Isaiah, in anticipation of the Captivity; and by the language of the later Psalmists in Babylon. Isaiah describes, with fine and indignant irony, how in Babylon "the smith with the tongs," and "the carpenter with his rule," would combine to make an idol "according to the beauty of a man;" and how worship would be paid to what was in reality only a "stock of a tree."[1] The Psalmist of the later epoch was probably inspired to write by the sight of the splendid imagery in the Babylonian temples, notably, perhaps, of the golden image of Belus:—

> "Their idols are silver and gold:
> Even the work of men's hands.
> They have mouths, and speak not:
> Eyes have they, and see not.
> They have ears, and hear not:
> Noses have they, and smell not.
> They have hands, and handle not;
> Feet have they, and walk not:
> Neither speak they through their throat.
> They that make them are like unto them:
> And so are all such as put their trust in them."[2]

[1] Isa. xliv. 12-20. [2] Ps. cxv. 4-8.

It was this idolatry which Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego resisted at the risk of their lives;[1] and at which Daniel struck a deadly blow when, according to the Alexandrian account, till lately read in our churches and undoubtedly embodying substantial history, he exposed the fraud of the priests of Baal, and destroyed the image.[2] And the author of Psalm cxix. feels himself throughout to be confronted with a vast system of falsehood, wielding enormous political and social power, persecuting the servants of the True God when it had an opportunity, and infecting the very air of thought and life with its pervading and noxious vapours. It is the consciousness of this which provokes the devotional intensity of this most gifted and exquisite Psalmist; his perpetually reiterated assurances of loyalty to the One True God, His Word, His law, His precepts, His statutes, His testimonies, His judgments, His saints, His worship, are so passionate and tender, because he is always conscious of the hateful darkness around:

> "Princes have persecuted me without a cause:
> But my heart standeth in awe of Thy Word.
> The proud have had me exceedingly in derision:
> Yet have I not shrinked from Thy law.
> As for lies, I hate and abhor them:
> But Thy law do I love.
> Many there are that trouble me and persecute me:
> Yet do I not swerve from Thy testimonies."[3]

How could the old Psalms of Israel, instinct with the memories of David's life, of Solomon's glory, of the solemnities of the now destroyed Temple, be sung in such an atmosphere as this? If sacred associations were to have any value, if sacred words were to mean anything, could they be prostituted to the amusement of a race

[1] Dan. iii. 1-25.

[2] *Bel and the Dragon*, 1-27, appointed in the old Lectionary as the first morning lesson for November 23.

[3] Ps. cxix. 161, 51, 163, 157.

which was devoted to a hideous and cruel superstition? No! captive Israel might sing the songs of captivity—such as this very 119th Psalm itself—in secret assemblies of the faithful: but to render the old Temple hymns before a heathen crowd of idolaters for their mere amusement—this was impossible.

Is not the Christian soul often carried captive, nowadays, into the Babylon of unbelief, or of half-belief? Is not the place in thought which is due to God often tenanted by abstractions which are just as senseless as the idols of Babylon,—creations of our thought, instead of creations of our fingers? "Nature," "Force," "Law," and what not—generalisations of our own minds as we look out upon the Universe around us,—these are placed on the throne of the One Infinite, Eternal, Self-existent Being. Or if any Christianity is left, it is a Christianity which is too often certain of no one article of the Christian Creed,—which is at best a feeble, vague sentiment. This modern Christianity is the consecration, not of faith, but of doubt. "Are the Sacraments means of grace?" "There is no saying." "Is the Bible inspired?" "Possibly." "Has the Blood of Christ an atoning and cleansing power?" "Perhaps." "Is Jesus Christ True God as well as True Man?" "There is something to be said for it." "Does the Holy Spirit sanctify the hearts of Christians?" "It is not quite impossible that He does." "Is God Three, and yet One?" "We must not be too dogmatic about it." "Is He a Personal Being, or only a stream of tendency making for righteousness?" "Who shall say, since the literary men hesitate?" Oh my brethren, who shall sing the Lord's song in such a strange land of half-belief as this? Whom are we to sing it to? What are we to sing about? How can we go to work at all where all is so vague and uncertain; where nothing is clear above our heads, and nothing solid beneath our feet?

"The Lord's song, indeed! Certainly if we are to sing the *Te Deum*, or the *Gloria in Excelsis*, we must be *bonâ fide* Christians—men who really believe that the creed of Christendom is true. We may do much else of a different kind, no doubt, in this state of mind, which just attributes a qualified probability to the Christian faith, or to certain parts of it; but, as for singing the Lord's song with that kind of sincerity which is owned in heaven—the thing is impossible.

4. "A strange land!" Babylon was the land of gigantic sins. We see this in the short prophecy of Habbakuk. Habbakuk was shocked and perplexed by the fact that these Chaldæans, the conquerors and punishers of the Jews, were more sinful than their victims!

> "Thou art," he cries, "of purer eyes than to behold evil,
> And canst not look on iniquity:
> Wherefore lookest Thou upon them that deal treacherously,
> And holdest Thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?"[1]

Habakkuk describes the sins of the conquering nation in detail. Its drunkenness, its debauchery, its grasping avarice, its bloodthirstiness, its stupid and degrading idolatry, its passion and energy in the propagation of hideous vice: all these form features of his description. There hung over all the magnificence of Babylon a dense atmosphere of sin, which made it impossible for the servants of God to sing His song—to do more than complain: "How long, O Lord, how long?"[2]

And the regenerate soul may be carried captive, we many of us know too well, into the Babylon of deadly sin. It may be carried captive, and at once make its escape and return. Happy they with whom it fares thus! Though the solitary return across the intervening desert of repentance be long and weary, happy if their true home be reached at last! "They shall come with songs to

[1] Hab. i. 13. [2] Hab. i. 2.

Zion: and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads: and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."[1]

But supposing the soul is detained in Babylon—supposing that habits of evil are formed, and that the enfeebled will is held down by bolts and bars which it cannot break, then how is it to sing "the Lord's song"? How is it to mount up on the wings of desire and hope to the Throne of the All-Holy, Whose laws it the while sets steadily at defiance? It may indeed utter the words; it may accurately render the musical notation: it may observe the laws of harmony and of time with faultless precision. What is all this but a frightful mockery, if the inner spring of true praise is wanting; if there is nothing to prompt the words which are uttered by the mouth; if it be a case of honouring God with the lips, while the heart is far from Him?[2] How can we sing the praises of our Maker, if we are not thankful to Him for the gift of an undying existence? or of our Redeemer, if our hearts do not tell us that we have been again washed in His Blood, and have not defiled our garments? or of our Sanctifier, if we know that we have grieved Him, and that He has taken Himself from us? Better far—I had almost allowed myself to say—better far sing the songs of Babylon itself, than burn out the last surviving tendernesses of conscience, by a service which cannot but be as odious to God as it is degrading to ourselves!

We may well indeed feel, all of us, that this life is an exile from our true home; and that while we live it, we cannot, at our best, sing aright the song of the Redeemed. The "new song" of the four creatures and of the four and twenty elders before the Lamb;[3] the "new song," which no man could learn but the hundred and forty and four thousand which were redeemed from the earth;[4] "the song

[1] Isa. xxxv. 10.
[2] St. Matt. xv. 7, 8; Isa. xxix. 13.
[3] Rev. v. 8-10.
[4] *Ib.* xiv. 3.

of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb," which is sung by them that have gotten the victory over the beast, and that stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God[1]—what is all this but a psalmody of the blessed, with the volume and perfections of which nothing on earth can compare? Here we sing, as it were, hesitatingly and by snatches, since we have, most of us, been carried captive to some Babylon of worldliness, or of unbelief, or of sin: and there is that which still checks or chokes in us the true voice of the soul. Then, when we shall have reached "the city of our solemnities;" then, when the gates of the Eternal Zion, conjubilant with song, open before us; then, when neither the world nor sin nor unbelief can mar the freedom of our utterance, we may hope to join

"our cheerful songs
With angels round the Throne;
Ten thousand thousand are their tongues,
While all their joys are one."

[1] Rev. xv. 2, 3.

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